

# FROM THE PRESIDENT

Jonathan H. Katz, Esq. | Hill Wallack, LLP  
[jkatz@hillwallack.com](mailto:jkatz@hillwallack.com)



I really do promise that at some point I will stop talking about 2020. That being said, I have one quick story for you and then a final trip back in time to talk about the mess that was 2020.

One of my favorite home videos is one that my wife took of my son, Nathan, and his friend, Robert, eating ice cream. At the time, Nathan and Robert were about three and four years old, respectively (see picture, inset, courtesy of Andrea Katz; Nathan is on the right). As can be expected from two toddlers, only about half of their ice cream made it into their mouths; the rest made it onto their faces, hands, shirts, the table, etc. But the best part about the video is that as Nathan would take a spoonful of ice cream, he would say, "yummm!" and then look at Robert. Not to be outdone, Robert would take a spoonful of ice cream, and he would say, "yummm!" and then look back at Nathan. This went on for a good thirty seconds until Nathan, looking at his ice cream covered hands and shirt, proclaimed "I'm a mess."

There is a fantastic book by Tim Harford addressing how to deal with all the disarray in our lives. It is appropriately titled *Messy: How to be Creative and Resilient in a Tidy-Minded World*. I could explain the book to you, but I could not do it better than Harford himself, so here is his synopsis:

*Messy* celebrates the benefits that messiness has in our lives: why it's important, why we resist it, and why we should embrace it instead. Using research from neuroscience, psychology, social science, as well as tales of inspiring people doing extraordinary things, I explain that the human qualities we value – creativity, responsiveness, resilience – are integral to the disorder, confusion, and disarray that produce them. In *Messy*, you'll learn about the unexpected connections between creativity and mess; understand why unexpected changes of plans, unfamiliar people, and unforeseen events can help generate new ideas and opportunities as they make you anxious and angry; and come to appreciate that the human

inclination for tidiness – in our personal and professional lives, online, even in children's play – can mask deep and debilitating fragility that keep us from innovation.

In the book, Harford tells a fantastic story about when David Bowie went to West Berlin in 1976 to work with Brian Eno of Roxy Music fame. When Bowie struggled to find a new direction, Eno produced a selection of cards he called *Oblique Strategies*. Each card had a different instruction, and often led to odd or even annoying challenges. The cards drove the other musicians crazy, but, in Harford's words, "the strange, chaotic working process produced two of the decades most critically acclaimed albums, *Low* and *Heroes*." Chaos, unforeseen events, and messiness lead to new ideas, new



opportunities, invention and innovation.

So what did I learn about the mess that was 2020? I am sure I could name twenty things and only half would be coronavirus related. But what did I learn about this chapter in 2020? That chaos and unforeseen events make us adapt. And adapt for the better.

When COVID hit, Tony Campisi and the chapter staff led us through those first uncertain months without missing a beat. Tony and the staff pivoted all of the chapter's educational and networking events to virtual formats, pulled off a virtual conference and expo in September, an in-person golf outing in October, and a "drive-in" annual meeting and awards event in December.

The pandemic made the chapter rethink the way we had done things in the past and focus on creating value for members. We were open minded to new ideas, we increased communication among the members using the chapter's website, social media, and virtual meet-ups/coffee chats. We provided opportunities for business partners to be recognized/network and for managers and homeowner leaders to learn virtually. And through all that, we were able to cut expenses and end the year with a budgetary surplus.

I am extremely proud of the work that our chapter did last year under unprecedented circumstances. And many of these new ideas borne out of chaos will likely continue and become part of how the chapter operates in the future. Like Harford explains in his book, sometimes disorder and creativity go hand in hand and can ultimately lead to innovation.

Nathan Katz – the little three-year old with the ice cream – is now fourteen. Like most kids his age, he has been cooped up at home for the last thirteen months. He's trying to deal with remote learning, continuously torturing his mother and younger sisters, and keeping in touch with his friends via video games, social media, and the occasional football game at the park. Every so often my wife and I have to make our way into his room to collect dirty laundry, dishes and cups, and throw out the mountain of trash.

Just this week (April 20<sup>th</sup>, as I write this) Nathan went back to school in-person for the first time since last March. He was admittedly a little anxious about it and not looking forward to getting up early. But then something magic happened. He actually liked being back at school, seeing his friends in person, and doing things that he had not done for over a year (all things that he had taken for granted for so long before the pandemic).

I assume most of us will have the same feelings once we are able to do those things too. Like going back to the office (for those that have been working from home). Or like going to the movies or a baseball game or travelling to another state or country. Or attending our in-person 2021 Annual Conference and Expo at Valley Forge Casino on June 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> (see what I did there?).

When you do those things for the first time (again), think about how you have adapted to deal with the obstacles that were placed in your way back in March 2020. Celebrate those victories and the innovation that came from having our lives disrupted for so long. Embrace the messiness that is life because that messiness makes us who we are. In many ways, Nathan is still the mess that he was when he was three years old. But, honestly, who of us isn't?

So that's it for this month. Thank you all for reading and thank you all for being members of the Keystone chapter (if I keep saying it, you'll get used to it). Here's to Jules Verne. Here's to my son, Nathan, as well as my daughters, Charlie and Molly. And, of course, here's to the Oxford comma. And join me next time when I will discuss why Cameron Crowe's "Almost Famous" is the perfect movie.

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