

# Trotting Out the Font of Wisdom

**By Alan Nelson**

You work a case. It goes well. The opposing party and the opposing party's counsel are pleasures to work with. The insurance adjuster assigned to the case feels no need to create self-preserving hoops to jump through. All seems well with your lawyer soul.

Then, something triggers a reassessment on the other side. A dollar figure demanded, or the attorney assigned the case screws up another case, or the adjuster is suddenly consolidated into another division to stack even more of a load on his or her desk. Perhaps the stock market falls another ten percent.

Whatever the catalyst, the other firm suddenly trots out from a labyrinth rat maze of offices the Font of Wisdom. The Font of Wisdom will be handling the claim from now until it is resolved. You feel your teeth gnash and your eyes weep. You feel you've been punched in the stomach after a meal of one too many burritos.

Even the other firm's lawyers, who have a guilty pride in having a Font of Wisdom, avoid their fellow colleague. The Font of Wisdom starts to break apart words with more words. He knows the secret words for every stove bolt and wing nut, brain portion and elbow part. Instead of using words like publicize or publish widely, he enunciates the word evulgate. You want to exoculate – to poke one's eyes out. You're just not sure whose eyes to do.

You immediately remember him from law school: the brilliant student who irritated even the hated professors. You watch him be the tour guide of how much you don't know. How amazed he is at how much you don't know. The volume of your not knowing is staggering. He is polite. He understands the mystery of the immensity of your ignorance. He knows you know if your parents suddenly became spectators, they would turn away from you with disgust.

He contemplates you like an entomologist studies a rare ant.

"Are you sure you understood my statements?" he asks. "Did you hear my question? Let me rephrase this again."

Pay attention, says his tone. Pay attention and you'll learn a thing or two. He often breaks out the latest law technology to punctuate his chatter with the newest bells and whistles.

As in your first week of law school, you feel incompetent and tongue-tied. You get frustrated. And he smiles, and says, "Do you need to take a break?"

The Font of Wisdom trots out. You pause for a moment. Whatever chance for common ground crumbles into bunkum. Whatever opportunity for negotiation careens into blather. Whatever probability for peace falls with a plop into the toilet.

Two options. Your client gives up in despair. Or, you wallow deep into the excrement. War begins.