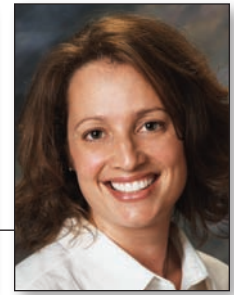


Musings on Three Very Meaningful Words, Part 1



By Jeff Scalzi & Melissa Hoff

He Said

Recover...Refocus...Reunite. What a perfect mantra for a new year, and an even more appropriate theme for the 2010 Annual LMA Conference. Separately, these three simple words are not uncommon in the myriad of PowerPoint decks and spreadsheets many of us produce to showcase our grand plans for the upcoming year. Together, though, and in this year in particular, these three words *combined* take on a life of their own. But let's start with "Recover."

The marketing and business development department head count at my firm—and we are not unique—is today 60 percent of what it was when I sat down to author this column last January. Back then, the glass-half-full part of me made statements such as, "Now is the time when marketers accustomed to a frantic pace can stop, take a deep breath and think more strategically," and "This new-found time should be spent working harder to maximize the value each member of your team is offering to the firm." I'm still waiting to take that deep breath.

So, perhaps I was a little too optimistic. But the events of the last 12 months make the start of *this* New Year more stimulating than ever. Important lessons have been learned: (a) rethink and constantly monitor the scalability both upward and downward of your marketing and business development initiatives; (b) "marketing on a shoestring" is possible, as long as there are human resources available to tie your lawyers' shoes (come on, we've all done it); (c) along the same lines, befriend your librarian, IT helpdesk and accounting personnel, as their skill sets can complement your team efforts and provide the perfect replacement for the person who used to sit down the hall; and (d) the legal term "reduction in force" was the most commonly used word in the English language in 2009. I'm just kidding, but it does garner more than 1.2 million hits on Google.

"Recover" is just what the doctor ordered as we begin 2010. Reflect on how our jobs have changed and how our clients' needs have evolved. Reset the bar on our firms' tolerance for innovative thinking. Look forward to exercising what we've learned about ourselves and our firms in the last year, and what we've learned about our industry and its ability to change and reinvent itself.

And finally—and I know I will—let's take that deep breath and move forward. Denver, here we come!

Jeff Scalzi, 617/832-7004, jscalzi@foleyhoag.com

She Said

As a logophile (a lover of words), my first move upon learning of this month's "Message from the Editors" topic was to consider the word in question. Recover: a verb meaning to regain, rescue or reclaim. It is sometimes used as a transitive verb meaning rehash, as in "Let's not re-cover that old ground."

Regain, rescue or reclaim. The words are similar, but nuanced and particularly interesting in light of the economic circumstances most firms were forced to confront in 2009. What are we trying to recover? Are we seeking to regain the economic stability and fast-paced growth that we once had? To rescue ourselves from the turmoil and transition that became the hallmarks of the year? Or to reclaim a legal industry "golden age" that is no longer? Or maybe we are just trying to recover our footing; to find our balance in light of the new circumstances that our firms are now facing.

As we look ahead to the coming year, it's tempting to slide into one of two camps: gloom and doom ("we're in for more of the same...") or optimism ("the worst is behind us and things will return to normal soon...").

But if we can take this opportunity to think about what a recovery might really mean to us professionally and to our law firms economically, we might discover an important middle ground. We might recover our footing, but we may not reclaim the unprecedented growth which characterized the legal industry for the better part of the decade. We might augment our skills as we seek to distinguish our firms and market our lawyers in an economic climate that is unlike any we have seen in our careers, though we may not rescue our firms from the hard decisions and sacrifices that many have been forced to make.

To put it another way, when we conceive of recovery, are we going to re-climb the mountain we just fell off of, or are we going to find a new mountain to ascend? The great words of Abraham Lincoln come to mind, "We must think anew and act anew."

We make decisions based on the opportunities that are currently before us, not the opportunities we had in the past. Economies and industries are volatile. We may have to recover the lessons learned during this difficult year at some point in the future as a cyclical economy ebbs, flows—and yes, recovers. ■

Melissa Hoff, 425/822-5262, melissa@mbhstrategies.com