

Without being morbid, this year has marked a milestone for me. I have outlived my father. He was just 44 days shy of his 60th birthday. Each year around this time, I light a mourning candle that burns for 24 hours. It is a Jewish custom...over 5000 years of tradition that links me with him and millions of ancestors. For 30 years, it's been a sign of remembrance, but now it serves as a guiding light and a reminder of the good that my Dad taught me...the building blocks for my state of mind...the standards for my place in society.

It is my time of the year for reflection so I offer some comments, observations and maybe some wisdom. This is what makes the holiday season so special. It is time to do a check on your State of Mind.

There are lots of things that are mysteries to me. I am sure someone has studied each of them, but I still do not have definitive answers. Some of these issues are the reasons why I remain committed to my profession. Here are few of my ongoing questions, dilemmas and suggestions for improvement:

- Why is it that some people who work so hard to please us to get our vote become so self-important after they are in office that they expect us to genuflect before them? Aren't they there to serve the public?

- Rudeness is bewildering. I hate to be simple, but the "Golden Rule" seems to have gone the way of most old reminders of civility. Governor Manchin has tried to create a customer friendly environment in all state agencies. Shouldn't this be the rule of the day in both the public and private sectors? Why should we need mandates or classes on how to treat others nicely? All you have to do is step out of your own skin and think about how others might see you. This also goes for how employers and supervisors treat those who work for (and with) them.

-Acceptance of mediocrity (and possibly political correctness) is ruining our country. It isn't okay to do the minimum. Shoddiness should be condemned and workers should not be able to protest that they are being treated unfairly when criticized. It can start with being able to read and write using proper English. I cringe when radio commentators say "graduated high school" or when slang becomes acceptable in formal writing. The complacency of just letting things go on without demanding excellence means the ruination of our social and economic fabric.

- Vilifying competition is undermining healthy development of successful people. We want ties for class valedictorian in high schools. Some think that no one should be Number One. What lessons does this teach? I'd like to see how such an approach would

be applied in the bid process in the real world. If I am close shouldn't I get the job? As long as the rules are set, having a winner is okay. Yes, some feelings might be hurt, but dealing with disappointments is as much a part of the learning process as winning.

- Why do our children believe that they have rights beyond basic food, shelter and clothing? Sure, we all want to our kids to have a good life but what do we teach them when they do not have to work for things? Somehow they take it for granted that they should have what they want when they want it...I Pods, cell phones, name brand clothes...no limits. Privileges must be earned and maintained with acceptance of responsibility.

- After sitting in on Social Security hearings as an advisor to Administrative Law Judges for too many years, I have come to question why people have to make themselves disabled in order to get medical coverage. You have to prove that you are incapable of working to get a medical card that you would lose if you got healthy enough to be employed. Something is broken. No one should have to beg to be helped.

- Health care benefits should be added to the Bill of Rights in some fashion. There has to be a better way. For a small business, the cost of offering insurance is becoming such a burden that it is almost impossible to do the right thing.

- It's amazing how we don't flinch at the exorbitant money made by entertainers and athletes but are not appalled by how little is available for (to name just a few) mental health, child protection, primary care and education.

- Quick fixes are what we have come to expect for all life's problems. Usually this is accompanied by the expectation that little effort will have to be exerted. The media is replete with this message. Do we really believe a pill can cure all of our ills without us doing something to effect changes that allow us assert control over our own lives?

All of this may make me look like a bit of a curmudgeon, but nothing could be farther from the truth. Asking questions leads to the quest for answers. When good things happen they should be treasured. So as we approach Christmas and the New Year, we should commit ourselves to making things better. I am so grateful...for the honor to write this column and to be on TV...for the "special seven" who believed in me and showed me the true heart of West Virginia...to all the entrepreneurs who take risks to chase their dreams...to my wife, son, staff, friends and colleagues who have helped me through my tough times...and finally to all of you who have trusted me to help you...THANK YOU...and as my father beseeched me...**Live today. Don't Wait. Be Grateful.**