

## TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS AND YOU'LL MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Most everyone has heard the story of George Bailey in the movie "It's a Wonderful Life." The story recounts George Bailey's life after he became distraught when a bank deposit went missing. He decided that his life wasn't worth living and he wanted to kill himself. Thereafter, he got a chance to see what would have happened to the people in his town and the people he loved the most if he had never lived. The result was devastating and reflected how we touch people's lives in ways that we don't always appreciate.

Last month, my son, Garrett, who is a freshman in college at Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey, sent me an e-mail with a Youtube link. As any of you might know who have teenage boys, they are not big on conversation and handle most remarks with one word or sometimes even less with an abbreviation with things like "K." In this e-mail, all Garrett wrote as to the link attachment was "watch this." I did. The story is so powerful and meaningful that I thought it would be a good idea to share with you and in some ways, it is similar to the story of George Bailey but with a twist.

It is the story of a 12-year old boy who was a drug dealer in Racine, Wisconsin. By the age of 15, according to the story, he had been arrested 15 times for drug-related offenses. Many people thought he was a lost cause. Around the age of 14, he was incarcerated for approximately one year. He states that during this incarceration, he started to reflect on his life and spent many hours of the day alone and crying. He began writing letters to his family and decided that he needed to change his life and become dedicated to what he wanted to do in this world.

When he got out of incarceration, he tried to do everything he could to show his family and especially his mother, Maddie Claybrook, that he was on the right track. He got a job at Burger King and wore the uniform and all. His old drug dealer friends would come by the restaurant and laugh at him. They would make fun of him and call him out and try and get him to leave. He refused to be influenced by that crowd and stayed the course working and improving his life.

About a year later, a search warrant was issued by the Racine Police Department for his home. The police had information that there were drugs in the house. The boy, now 16 years old, was home asleep when the police arrived. They came in and he was placed in a chair in the living room and handcuffed. He was told by the police officer that there were drugs coming out of this house and that they were going to find them. He started crying and lost it and said he wasn't involved and that he

wasn't in the drug culture anymore. The police searched the whole house and found nothing. Eventually the search went out to the garage and they located 15 grams of crack cocaine. The police officer confronted him with the drugs. He told the officer that he wasn't involved, that it wasn't his and that he had nothing to do with it. The police officer, Rick Geller, with the City of Racine Police Department, states that if the young boy had been charged that night, he would have been looking at a minimum of 10 years in prison. He took photos of the individuals at the house, he took photos of the house and then he called his supervisor. He told his supervisor what he had found and what the boy had stated. The supervisor told him that he had more than enough evidence to charge him right now with the drug offense. Interestingly, Officer Geller told his supervisor that he did not believe that the kid had any idea the drugs were in the garage and that he thought it would be a huge mistake to charge this kid. The supervisor told Officer Geller that if he thought it would be a huge mistake, then don't do it. Officer Geller came back into the living room, uncuffed the boy and told him "I hope I am not making a mistake."

Ten years later, Officer Geller and that boy, now known as Coran Butler, were reunited for the first time at an NBA charity event. As is now known, Coran Butler has gone on to be a star in the NBA and one of the winners of numerous charitable endeavors including being named as Role Model of the Year by the Connecticut Chamber of Commerce for all his charity work and leadership.

It is one of the most incredible stories I have ever read. Sometimes in our life as a civil lawyer, we have to make judgment calls and I know we all worry about making a mistake. Sometimes you have to use your gut instincts and go with what you think is right. And, maybe, just maybe, you might end up helping a young man who goes on to become Coran Butler.

I know we have a lot of young or new aspiring plaintiffs trial lawyers who are out there right now waiting at the gate to make your statement about your client and their cause. Trust your instincts about whether or not to go to trial on your case. Sometimes you will win and sometimes you will not, but your client will always be grateful that you stood up for them and fought for their rights!