TYLA in Action

The Texas Young Lawyers Association co-hosted—along with the State Bar of Texas Local Bar Services and the Texas Access to Justice Commission—the 2018 Bar Leaders Conference, which was held July 20-21 at the Westin Austin at the Domain. The conference provided panel discussions on numerous topics, CLE credit, and breakout sessions to foster ideas for growth.

From left: Bronwyn Blake, of the Texas Advocacy Project; Britney Harrison, of the Texas Young Lawyers Association; Adam Schramek, of the Austin Bar Association; Jonathan Ryan, of RAICES; and Kelsey Snapp, of Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, presented a panel at Bar Leaders titled "Staying Relevant at Bar Leaders."

From left: TYLA Chair Aaron Burke, TYLA President Sally Pretorius, and members of the Hidalgo County Young Lawyers gathered for some exercise during a break at Bar Leaders.

From left: Jefferson County Young Lawyers members Valerie Lewis and Chris Mahfouz present some of their highlights from the year.

TYLA recently launched a Diversity Toolkit that includes helpful information and guides on how to create diversity within local affiliates. For more, go to tyla.org.

You Stink at Predicting Your Future Happiness (and a Lifehack for How to Do It Right)

Seeing the future has to be one of the top five superpowers I would choose from a Comic-Con-size list of superpowers. Rather than handwringing about whether you should be a trial or transactional lawyer, change career paths, date Jane or Sue, or choose the mid-sized sedan versus the pickup truck, you could just peer into a crystal ball and know how happy you would be with your decision. Unfortunately, science. We are simply not equipped with an imagination powerful enough to foresee our future happiness.

The question in a nutshell: Why do we fail miserably at predicting future happiness but have such confidence that we are great at predicting it? I recently listened to a podcast on this topic, and I found myself reading a few studies by the social psychologists perhaps best known for investigating this phenomenon.[1]

The studies reveal two big reasons for our future happiness predicting woes. First, you cannot imagine all the details future you will encounter when you get there. For example, you might imagine yourself 10 years from now trying a complex commercial case. You might see yourself standing in front of a jury looking sharp, cross-examining some poor schmuck in a suit, while the judge conspicuously naps. But in this mental exercise, you fail to appreciate all of the little steps and details that make up that future experience: preparing pretrial documents and exhibits, booking your hotel, driving to the courthouse, the quality of your relationship with opposing counsel, etc. Second, and probably the more potent reason, is that we fail to appreciate how much different we will be in our own imagined future. We think the person we are today is, more or less, the person we will be for the rest of our lives. But, science, again![2] Whether you are young, middle-aged, or older, you are going to change tremendously over the next decade.

So what's the lifehack? The answer: "surrogation," which is a $5 word for simply asking another person who has made the same decision how happy it made them. Francois de La Rochefoucauld, a 17th-century writer and thinker, best summed up the concept: "Before we set our hearts too much upon anything, let us first examine how happy those are who already possess it."

In my favorite study on this topic, college women were given two options before a speed date.[3] Those given "option one" received a biography and photograph of the young man they would meet. Those given "option two" received only one piece of information—how much the young lady before them enjoyed their speed date with the same young man. Of course, virtually all of the young women thought they would prefer option one because humans universally believe we are better at predicting future happiness based on our own imagination. However, the study results clearly show the option two group more accurately predicted their happiness with their speed date simply based on neighborly advice from the woman before them.

Moral of the story: if you find yourself in the sometimes-terrifying position of making a big life decision, my advice to you is to surrogate. Find someone who has made the same choice before, and ask him or her how they feel about it. Science confirms your neighbor's experience is a better predictor of your future happiness than your own imagination.

AARON J. BURKE
Chair,
Texas Young Lawyers Association Board of Directors

NOTES
1. T.D. Wilson & D.T. Gilbert, *Affective Forecasting,* 35 Advances in Experimental Social Psychology 345-411 (2003).
2. Jordi Quoidbach, Daniel T. Gilbert, & Timothy D. Wilson, *The End of History Illusion,* 339 Science 96-98 (Jan. 4, 2013).
3. D.T. Gilbert, M.A. Killingsworth, R.N. Eyre & T.D. Wilson, *The Surprising Power of Neighborly Advice,* 323 Science 1617-1619 (Mar. 20, 2009).