

Achilles Healing



Over four years ago, I tore my Achilles heel while in a boot camp class. There I was: over 50, huffing and puffing next to a young, nimble woman in her early 20s and my ego wanted to move to

her rhythm. My body, unfortunately, had other plans, and I tore my Achilles. Initially, I blamed her for stomping on the back of my leg; but as the injury subsided, I realized my fading ego was what caused my injury.

An Achilles tear can be loud; mine was. It sounds like what it is—a very large tendon in your body tearing, in my case, apart. The sound that came out of my body seemed animalistic, inhuman. I could not walk it off. All I could do was cry ugly tears. (The story does get better.)

For three weeks, I stubbornly refused to go to the doctor. I iced it, heated it, and



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babied it, until I could not stand the pain anymore. After x-rays and a MRI, I met with the doctor. He told me that he wanted to meet me. He wanted to meet the woman who walked around on her torn Achilles for three weeks because he believed, until then, that it could not be done.

During that visit, he told me two things that have resonated with me since. One was that having a high tolerance for pain was not necessarily a good thing. Second, that my health needed to be addressed tomorrow and nothing else had a higher priority. My health meant more than my wealth.

After surgery—which I envisioned would take an hour and I would wake up ready to run a marathon (which would have been quite miraculous since I had never run one, but you get the idea)—I thought I was going to rebound with a vengeance. I didn't. Instead, I had to learn my next lesson and that was to rely on other people. I could not drive. The anesthesia made me so sick, and I hate OxyContin. For an independent person, reliance on other people made me feel absolutely vulnerable—which, I have come to learn, is a good thing.

Wikipedia defines the term “Achilles heel” as “a deadly weakness in spite of overall strength, which can actually or potentially lead to downfall.” In Greek mythology, Achilles was told that he would die young. To prevent this, his mother dipped him into magical water to make him invulnerable, but she held him by the space between his ankle and his heel. This space was not covered by the water, and he dies from a heel wound; thus, the myth.

Our country began with some very noble thoughts that it would be a country of laws, not ruled by kings and the rare queen. Instead, our founders believed that “we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” My goodness, the Declaration of

Independence was such a brilliant concept, such lovely words. But, it was vulnerable, because it did not include all of us. It did not include women. It did not include the poor. It did not include any people of African heritage, slave or free. It did not include anyone who wasn't just like those brilliant men who wrote it—and that is the legal profession's Achilles' heel.

And just like my Achilles tear, it hobbles us. It causes us to not stand as straight and proud as we could if we really knew that we were impervious to discrimination on any level. See, we lawyers are important. As a country of laws, we are the ones that help society understand, live by and even die by those laws. That is why we are required to cloak all of the members of the bar with the same rights that our founders so generously designed for themselves. All of us must make every effort to believe that a country for the people, by the people, and of the people includes *all* people. If we do not, we will continue to live short of our promise—something I am not willing to do.

So what must we do? What are the specifics? We must hold ourselves accountable every day to live a life worth living. We must see a piece of ourselves in every person, no matter the race, gender, or background. We must practice this legal gift that we have ethically. We must pay as much for personal development as we do for our clothes. (I do understand.) We must contribute to organizations dedicated to the eradication of discrimination, like the diversity sections of DRI, NAMWOLF, CMCP, and MCCA, among others. We must mentor, because we truly need each other. We must be relentless optimists in America's legal future in the face of hate. We must hold ourselves and others to language that would be kind to everyone's ears. Bottom line: to “heal” our profession, we must be a legal profession that is willing to give up its high tolerance for the pain of exclusion—starting now. 