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Italian Lessons for an Arizona Lawyer

You would think that hanging out in an ancient Italian town that still clings to its Etruscan roots would offer little insight into how to be a lawyer in Arizona. You know going in that the pasta and the pizza and the vino are going to be great, but what could

you really learn that you could take back to the office? Finding out that Michelangelo was ambidextrous is interesting, but not that impactful. But, as usual, there is always much to learn if you close your mouth and open your mind.

The first lesson concerns lifestyle.

Most Italians have learned that work is not what you do—life is what you do. Americans find it incomprehensible that almost all commerce comes to a close from 1 to 4 each afternoon so that people can return to their homes and enjoy the day's main meal with their family.

How could you waste that

much time right in the middle of the workday?

The answer is that they don't just talk about family, they prioritize family. How a person spends his time tells you what his priorities actually are, much more so than what he tells you his priorities are. Italians love their businesses and want to succeed financially as much as the next guy; but for most it would seem ridiculous to spend the hours away from home that many lawyers do because we are trying to make money to support our family. They know that real support for a family is multifaceted.

This extends to time spent with friends and food, as well. Italians will drive 100 m.p.h. to get to a restaurant and linger over a cappuccino for three hours. They believe that sitting and talking with friends every day is important. They also think that food is more than a supplement; it has its own beauty that can only be appreciated if you take the time to savor it. Like relationships, it can't be rushed. It is about the journey, as well.

We stayed in Cortona, the little town on a hill made famous by Frances Mayes in *Under the Tuscan Sun*. They say that if someone who lived there 200 years ago or even 600 years ago were placed anywhere in town today, he would be able to recognize every street and most of the buildings. The

storefronts have changed, of course, but he could tell you what was around each corner and where each street leads.

Italians value the past, and in Cortona they don't ever tear down anything. It would be unthinkable.

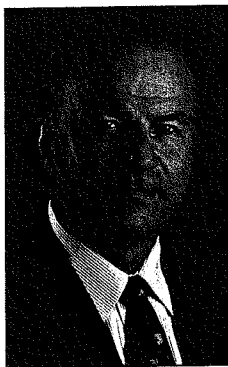
In Arizona, we have a Native American past that we rarely consider. We have a cowboy past that seems almost quaint to most people today. We used to wear cowboy boots to court; I was no real cowboy, but I loved that part of our heritage and thought it was cool to see it linger even in the courtrooms. Today the footwear is the same here as in Atlanta or L.A.; in fact, most things in Phoenix are the same as in Atlanta or L.A. Because we didn't cherish our past or recognize its value, we have become homogenized. That is a mistake we need to change now before it is too late.

Which leads to the final lesson: Italians have not been afraid to do things big and to do things right. The churches, the buildings and the art in every big city and tiny hamlet in Italy are truly magnificent. I know that it helps to have some zealots in the work force instead of holding political office, and the Catholic Church's bankroll didn't hurt either. But more than that, they had the vision and the passion and the intellect to value the aesthetic enough to make the investment in things that would inspire forever.

Here, everything is about the bottom line, and the bottom line is generally very short-sighted and risk-averse.

One night, after a few glasses of Chianti, I wrote on Facebook about the rising crescent moon illuminating the Tuscan countryside below our house. A friend of mine responded that he had just missed his plane in Denver and had to spend the night in the airport, so I could take that crescent moon and stick it up my ass. I know. Real life has returned for me now that my month in Italy is over. But I learned some things, and I'm not going to let this hectic world of ours let me forget them. There is more to life.

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