



Sotomayor Law

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Mediation, Arbitration and Business Dispute Services

“Elements of Style”

April 3, 2017

Last week I attended a memorial service for a 61-year-old businesswoman, wife, and mom. I didn't know Tamara well, only through my chamber of commerce, but she touched me gently and deeply whenever I saw her. So much about the service, and her, was unforgettable.

It turns out that Tamara was a local icon of sorts, a business leader and visionary grounded with compassion, common sense, and humility. The speakers at the ceremony all hailed her many talents, but the funny thing was that there were so many stories about her fashion sense, or rather, her lack thereof.

As an owner of an in-home care service for seniors, Tamara wore a uniform of sorts – everywhere. Every speaker at the service described her regular outfit – a modest, crisply ironed button-down blue shirt with company logo and $\frac{3}{4}$ length sleeves, business slacks, and “sensible” shoes. Everyone, from the pastor to her colleagues to her family, couldn't help but comment on Tamara's lack of style.

One non-profit director told of dressing as Tamara's twin for three monthly meetings in a row, but she lamented that her outfit never seemed to quite match up and nobody even noticed the joke.

A community leader could not help associating the color blue with Tamara, mainly due to her uniform.

Her genuinely loving and admiring husband described his wife's “lack of style” and proudly announced that many times he was the one who ironed those memorable button-down shirts.

Everyone spoke of Tamara's smile that could melt hearts and light up a room. Everyone spoke of her frankness, strategic thinking, and tireless efforts to help others improve themselves and their businesses. A client told of how Tamara's touch brought a smile to the face of his wife in the end stages of Alzheimer's Disease. A businessman laid off after 40 years spoke of how her encouragement helped him find new professional paths. Her oldest daughter marveled both at her spreadsheet-laden to-do e-mails and at her motherly capacity for forgiveness and understanding.

And always, the mourners kept coming back to her style. What is style? Tamara wasn't fashion-forward, but she most certainly had style. Her clothes were comfortable, neat, and branding-brilliant. Would they have made the fashion magazines? No. But Tamara elevated style to heights fashion may never achieve. Character, determination, commitment, ambition, humility, and passion were all celebrated in a button-down shirt and sensible shoes. Tamara was a style sensation dressed in what most described as downright dowdy.

One day, I hope to have as much style as Tamara did. Tamara, thank you for the inspiration.

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