Charles Eppolito III is a consummate planner, a meticulous organizer and a tireless strategist. His own toughest critic, he is driven to use good judgment, wisdom and prudence in his decisions and leaves little to chance. Ten years ago, he decided that he wanted to be the president of the Pennsylvania Bar Association and set about learning all that he could to make that happen. He takes the role of PBA president so seriously that he’s getting married this July 4 weekend because it’s a slow bar week.

But he also shows great sensitivity, sympathy and emotionality, especially regarding his fiancée, his family, his little dog and legal justice. He built his career on his preparation and diligence, as well as an ability to relate to clients and a passion to serve as an advocate. Eppolito’s inclination toward emotional expression seems at odds with his lawyerly mien, but love, faith, maturity and surviving a harrowing natural disaster tend to change a person’s perspective.

A partner at White and Williams LLP, Philadelphia, Eppolito practices primarily medical malpractice defense as well as other insurance-related defense, including general negligence, electrical engineering and product liability in utility cases. The medical and psychiatric malpractice cases he has tried to verdict include cardiology, cardiothoracic surgery, nephrology, neurology, obstetrics/gynecology, orthopedics, pharmacology, psychology and urology. He has also participated in numerous catastrophic medical malpractice and brain-injury cases. In other words, he’s had to face situations fraught with heartache and grief.

Eppolito met his fiancée, Lisa Marie Korab, five years ago. Ever the cautious planner, he finally proposed on July 7, 2017, during a romantic weekend in Williamsburg, Va. During Labor Day weekend 2017, the two traveled to St. Maarten to plan their destination wedding. On Sept. 6, at about 2 a.m., Hurricane Irma hit the island.
We heard glass shattering. The hurricane shutters blew off and trees were hitting the building. Our room was on the top (third) floor of the hotel. The wind blew the balcony door open, so water and debris were coming into the room. The power was out, and we went into the bathroom and pulled the mattress over us. We heard the roof being ripped off. Within seconds of that, we heard concrete crumbling and water pouring in, and the building started shaking,” Eppolito said.

Korab assumed he had a plan, because “he always does.” When he told her, “There is no Plan B,” she was convinced they were going to die. He did his best to reassure her, and they relied on their faith. After several hours, hotel staff knocked on the door and told them they were to evacuate to the second floor. They were placed in a room with no electricity or running water and with two couples who did not speak English. Six hours later, they made their way back to their original room. As time went by, they heard stories of bands of looters with machetes and guns. The sound of gunshots, which grew ever closer, confirmed these reports. Someone tried to break into the room across the hall until Eppolito scared them away.

“We stayed in the room. Ninety to 95 percent of the island was destroyed. Roads were blocked, even though the military
After two days barricaded in the room, they were evacuated. They left most of their possessions behind; boarded a broken-down, windowless bus held together with blue duct tape and went to an unknown port where they waited for a few more hours before they boarded a rescue boat. They had no idea where they were going. Nearly 12 hours later, they were in Guadeloupe, where they finally could shower and get some sleep. From there they went to Martinique, then Barbados, got a flight to Toronto and finally flew to Philadelphia. Their escape included six different countries in four days, four of those countries in a 26-hour period.

“Going through that changes you. You see the bigger picture, where little things don’t bother you. You see more clearly where you fit in the world and what you want to do in life. Now, when we experience something annoying, like heavy traffic, we say, ‘At least it’s not a Category 5 hurricane.’ ”

Eppolito grew up in Worcester Township, Montgomery County, the eldest of four children of Charles Jr. and Elaine Eppolito. His father worked in a warehouse. His mother had the biggest influence on him, teaching him to love others and always put their needs before his own. The Eppolitos emphasized hard work and academics. He loved playing sports, and his father either coached the team or attended every one of his games, whether it was football, basketball or baseball. As a child, he wanted to be an athlete and then a politician. “I wanted to make a difference. I liked trying to persuade people,” he said. When he was in high school, he realized being a lawyer would provide challenges and opportunities to help people and make a difference.

The first in the family to go to college, Eppolito attended Villanova University where he majored in business management with a concentration in international business and a minor in communication arts. After college, he went to Villanova University School of Law.

“I worked a lot during college and law school, 20-30 hours a week, working as a waiter, assistant manager at a restaurant and a bartender. In law school I was an intern for the Montgomery County district attorney and spent the first year in trials, the second in the appellate division and the third in the pre-trial division. I could actually argue criminal cases. It was thrilling. I handled at least 40 hearings when I was in school,” he said.

With that experience and his law degree, he took a job at a firm in State College. As a young lawyer, he had heard of the American Bar Association but not the PBA. The chair of the PBA Young Lawyers Division called Eppolito about becoming a Zone 11 chair because several colleagues had recommended him. He was interested.

In 2003 then-YLD Chair Eppolito presented the PBA YLD Liberty Bell Award to former Gov. Mark Schweiker for his leadership during the Quecreek Mining rescue operations.

To prepare for his term as president, Eppolito talked to at least a dozen former PBA presidents.
in doing community service and finding professional development opportunities, so he accepted the challenge.

Within a year, PBA members asked Eppolito to run for YLD secretary. He was elected YLD chair in 2002. Then-PBA President Timothy J. Carson urged him to get more involved, so he did. “At some point, I decided I wanted to be PBA president, but I knew I had a lot to learn,” he said.

He said, “I got an officer position and got bitten by the leadership bug. The more opportunities you have for leadership, the more you can help.” He was PBA secretary from 2006 until 2009, and chair of the PBA House of Delegates from 2011 until 2013. In 2015, he ran for PBA vice president in a contested race. “I went around the state and listened. I asked people what they wanted and needed. I molded my vision around that. I thoroughly enjoyed it.”

A positive and energetic person, Eppolito enjoys being around others and feeds off their energy. He loves sports, both watching and playing, and he enjoys exercise. One of his favorite pastimes is playing with Duke, his spritely and somewhat ironically named miniature dachshund. His family gets together at his parents’ house for Sunday dinners.

He sees the PBA presidency as a four-year post. As vice president, president-elect, president and immediate past president, the person plans and implements programs and builds networks. “We have tremendous leadership, very strong and devoted. PBA has amazing sections and committees who will be even more prepared after the PBA committee and section chair leadership training. It is a team of hundreds of people working together. I have a four-year plan, even beyond four years,” Eppolito said.
“Reasonable people will be involved in what they value. The key is to communicate what that value is.”

To prepare for his term as president, Eppolito talked to at least a dozen former PBA presidents. “I asked them to give me ideas or suggestions of what I could do, and I asked what they could teach me,” he said.

A year before he became president, he thought about how he could have everything in place so that he could hit the ground running. He appointed committee chairs early and talked to each one about maintaining the member-to-member connections. As president-elect, he worked closely with then-President Sharon R. López, and now he will depend on incoming President-elect Anne N. John and Vice President David E. Schwager to step in where needed.

“Sharon has done an outstanding job with her energy and passion to reach out to groups across the state. She’s done a wonderful job in engaging them and learning what they value. Every single one of us has things that we value, and we decide what we’re willing to expend to get it. People will be involved in what they value. The key is to communicate that value and to help them get more engaged and convinced that the value that PBA offers is immense and far outweighs the resources to achieve that value.”

Eppolito knows the world is hectic, and lawyers have many demands on their time, energy and money. But for him, the PBA has truly enhanced his career and his life. “I love the comradeship. People are the PBA.

They want to improve themselves and the world. I met some of my best friends through the PBA. The professional development opportunities are superb, with the strong committee and section structure, through publications, high-level discourse and the potential referral networks.

One area I will focus on is the training, equipping and empowering of sections and committees to work more directly with members and focus on serving our members. Our committees and sections are well positioned to provide valuable benefits and services to our members relating to their areas of practice and to otherwise support members’ practices.”

His message will be the PBA is the place to develop professionally and to create a more effective law practice. “It truly is your other partner. PBA people have a conscience and a soul. They work tirelessly to promote access to justice, do pro bono work and other services. Advocacy needs to remain strong and become stronger as we lobby for the profession, clients and improvements in the justice system.”

Law practices are evolving, and lawyers have to be nimble, agile and adept. “My goal is to assist lawyers in their practices, to work hard strengthening the PBA, energize it and find the best ways to ensure viability,” Eppolito said.

He will work to engage members, even those who don’t have much time, encouraging them to take advantage of publications, programs and other benefits. “There is something for everyone. Grassroots is the best way to grow the membership. One other thing I’m looking at is millennials, a huge group. The perception is they don’t want to get involved. I’m not convinced. I want to provide opportunities for more family-friendly experiences. I don’t want anyone to have to choose between the PBA and family. We could do more to have family-friendly experiences, particularly involving the Young Lawyers Division and the Commission on Women in the Profession. We want to provide opportunities to
help people improve their practice while not taking away from family time. At meetings and events, welcome families and have parallel programs, even things like picnics and softball games are good, and they let members know we’re thinking of them and trying to assist them,” he said.

Technology offers other opportunities for member connections, and Eppolito would like to use video conferences and webinars to bring people together. He will encourage committees and sections to use their web pages effectively and promote the Listservs and social media.

“We need to communicate with members and prospective members in the manner they prefer to get information. Most lawyers are aware of the PBA but don’t have a high level of knowledge about what we do. We are not one size fits all. The keys are to communicate the benefits in a way that reaches the most lawyers and present that message in a way that resonates,” he said.

One example of identifying changes in the environment and recognizing the needs for lawyers and citizens is the creation of the PBA Cybersecurity and Data Privacy Committee. There is a clear need for law firms, who are targets for hackers, to protect their data. The committee “represents my interest in continually searching for new ways to be relevant and to serve our members and the needs of their clients,” Eppolito said.

Eppolito leads White and Williams’ internal CLE programming, coordinating monthly educational programs on legal issues across various practice areas. He has served as an investigative panel member of the PBA Judicial Evaluation Commission, as a hearing committee member of the Disciplinary Board of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and is a former board member of the Justinian Society of Philadelphia. He is an active member of the American, Pennsylvania and Philadelphia bar associations. He served in the ABA House of Delegates 2005-07 and 2012 to present, and in its Medical Professional Liability Standing Committee, Tort Trial and Insurance Practice Section, TIPS Medicine and Law Committee, and Bioethics and the Law special committee.

Eppolito’s goal is to bring all Pennsylvania lawyers together. “Sharon’s focus was on fostering diversity, and that work will live on. We want to make sure we find the opportunity for everyone to grow as an individual and as a bar member. My mission and goal is that the PBA is the home for all Pennsylvania lawyers to improve and to serve. I want to equip members to address the needs of major stakeholders (whomever they may be) all over the state.”

His good sense and his sensibilities will be apparent as he leads the PBA in the coming months. 😊

Nancy H. Wilkes is PBA senior publications editor.
Portrait photographs by C. Pruett Studios, Havertown.

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