

# AER eNews

*An Occasional Electronic Newsletter from Alan E. Ramos  
Actor and Attorney*

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## *It's Spring, It's Spring – OK, So What?*

By Alan E. Ramos

It is officially Spring, but it's hard to tell. In LA, it is Spring with occasional fits of Summer and a day or two of Winter (OK, winter in LA is a relative term). The trees are somewhat confused and so am I (nothing new there); life goes on. In this issue, there are two guest articles and a bit of prose that I believe may be of interest to you. Also, other than an occasional very indirect smart-a\$\$ comment or two, I have declared this newsletter to be a politics-free zone. I hope that you appreciate and enjoy this effort.

## *Thinking Critically for and about Effective Leadership*

By Nancy L. Southern

With a growing political divide in this country, how can we effectively discuss and debate the needs and future direction of our country, the well-being of our citizens, and our participation locally and globally? From my view, our challenge with bridging the many differences that divide us is grounded in the underdeveloped skill of critical thinking. We need to develop the ability to take a broader view, connect the dots, consider the assumptions behind our thinking, and engage different perspectives, competencies that support effective leadership in a collaborative environment.

Often in talking with people about critical thinking, I receive a response that equates it with criticism. We so often see interactions where people attack the ideas of others and take a competitive stance, thinking that there is a need to win an argument or come out on top in some other way. This behavior is destructive and tears down the relational fabric that supports respect and cooperation. We see it as a norm of behavior all too often in organizations where it erodes trust and open communication and makes teamwork and collaboration difficult.

So what does critical thinking look like? At the core, critical thinking is about recognizing and challenging beliefs and assumptions in a way that constructively brings them into conversation to be considered, given the context of situation. You might say it is the process of thinking about thinking, or becoming aware of how we think about something to the point that we can consider whether that thinking is serving us and others well. When we think critically we recognize that there are many factors that contribute to any situation, we seek to understand the context of a situation as best we can, the relationships of the factors within the context, and how the factors are

connected. Critical thinking can best be accomplished by considering different viewpoints, as this can enlarge our understanding of the context and help us consider the assumptions we hold. You might say it helps us see the forest through the trees.

An important competency for critical thinking is our ability to understand systemic and cultural contexts. I refer to it as an ability to look through those two lenses. Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (1990) described systems thinking as “a discipline for seeing wholes” and a “framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static 'snapshots’”. While the field of systems theory is quite dense, the concept of understanding systems dynamics can be simple. Here is a short video of Senge talking about how to approach developing a systems lens through understanding the interrelationships and dynamics that exist in family systems. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXdzKBWDraM&list=PLhsIdCVDmWaNzCS5cqX\\_pfk7F\\_WSQ51bo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXdzKBWDraM&list=PLhsIdCVDmWaNzCS5cqX_pfk7F_WSQ51bo). This skill of systems thinking develops as we focus our attention more on the relational dynamics rather than just the observable behavior which supports us in understanding cultural systems and how they lead to behavioral and relational differences.

A second competency for critical thinking is developing our ability to ask powerful, thought-provoking questions that support that systemic understanding. We cannot think critically about something if our frame of reference is narrow. We need to be knowledgeable of the context and the systemic interactions and dynamic relationships that are at play. We discover those interrelationships through asking systemic questions. These are questions that don't have easy or direct answers, but rather lead us on a journey of discovery, thus broadening our perspective of the situation at hand. Powerful questions can help us question our own assumptions and thus open our minds to new possibilities.

Let's take a look at this related to leadership. Leaders are often viewed as effective and strong if they show up confident and speak in a way that demonstrates that confidence and inspires others. While these are important characteristics of leaders, they really don't tell us much about how effective a leader will be in his/her daily interactions. Why? Leadership is a relational act. Effective leaders support and mentor others to have confidence and develop the needed competencies and skills. They are most effective when working in relationship with others, clearing the obstacles and providing the resources necessary for others to succeed. The complexity before us makes it difficult if not impossible for effective leaders to make decisions and take action without engaging the knowledge held by others around them. What is needed now is the ability to share leadership, by developing leadership skills and abilities across the organization and developing effective processes for engaging collaboratively.

Critical thinking comes into play in the above example in two ways. First, when we see a leader who is confident, charismatic, and even a great motivational speaker, we might

admire those traits and instead of assuming that person is an effective leader, we would want to inquire about or observe her interaction with others, raise questions about how she effectively engages, supports and enables others. Is she able to step aside and let others lead when appropriate? Is she able to be seen as one among other leaders, rather than needing to be seen as “the leader”? How effective is she in communicating in ways that support others in speaking openly and truthfully? How effective is she in providing critical yet supportive feedback for developmental purposes? How often does she take the time to give recognition to others not just for what they have accomplished, but also for what they are learning and contributing to the effectiveness of the whole?

If you are a leader or seeking to develop your leadership competencies and skills, use the above questions in reflection on your own leadership ability. Critical thinking can help us transform our understanding of leadership, develop ourselves as leaders, and create new ways of identifying and developing others as leaders who can transform organizational systems. Next time you see a leader who makes a good impression, look beyond the surface of how that person shows up and consider how effective he or she might be in working collaboratively with others, sharing leadership and supporting others to be great leaders.

*Nancy L. Southern works with executives and management teams to build cultures of collaboration in business, healthcare, government, education, and social sectors. Her services include leadership development, coaching, organizational assessments, retreat design and facilitation, change management and organizational learning strategies. She deliver workshops in leadership, diversity, change management, and related topics. Her website: [collaborativecultures.com](http://collaborativecultures.com) (Nancy Southern & Associates)*

## ***Homeowner's Insurance is Important***

*By Robert B. Jacobs*

Several years ago a homeowner wanted to trim a large tree in his front yard. He got two friends to help him. The tree was so large that one of the friends climbed up into the tree. The friend intended to cut large branches from the tree while he was standing in it.

A rope was obtained, and was tied onto one of the branches to help control it as it fell from the tree. However, these men weren't professionals, and there was a problem with the rope. It failed to work as anticipated, and the friend in the tree lost his balance. He fell out of the tree onto the sidewalk below, and landed on his elbows. He ended up with serious injuries and he filed suit against the homeowner.

The homeowner had a policy of homeowner's insurance, and the homeowner made a claim under the policy. The insurer accepted the claim and defended the homeowner in the lawsuit.

Sometimes homeowners don't realize that many (or perhaps most) homeowner policies provide two types of coverage. The first type of coverage is usually for the house and its

contents. But there's often also a second type of coverage that some homeowners may not be aware of. This type of coverage often provides insurance coverage for many types of general liability claims. This second type of coverage was the policy provision that provided coverage for the homeowner whose friend fell out of the tree.

Why does this make a difference? Because some homeowners will ultimately pay off their homes. Once they do, their lenders will no longer require that the homeowner purchase homeowner's insurance. But it's always a good idea to carry such insurance, not only to protect the house and its contents, but also to provide coverage for liability for some accidents. Coverage can vary from policy to policy, and homeowners should consult a professional in order to determine what their coverage needs are and the types of coverage their policy provides.

*Robert B Jacobs practices real estate, business, bankruptcy and foreclosure law in the Bay Area. The foregoing article is not a complete discussion of the subject address, and should not be relied on. Readers with specific questions or issues should consult an attorney. His website: <http://rbjlaw.com/home>*

## *Prose from the Heart*

*By Alan E. Ramos*

### **THE ACTOR**

By Alan E. Ramos

You get an audition notice. You look at the sides. You say – “I can do this!” But what are the odds? 3,000 to 1; 10,000 to 1; a million to one? If that really bothers you (or you're sane or practical or just not a bit crazy), then stop. Don't go into that room.

However, if you have a passion that drives you, a demon that is constantly in your ear telling you that to act is to breathe, that acting is living, you walk into that room. You give them the best that you have, say thank you, walk out, throw away your sides and go on to the next one. You don't concern yourself with booking the part – you booked the room. You gave them something to remember you by – you gave them a small piece of your soul – gladly.

You do this without a care in the world, because you just spent the last few minutes of your life doing something that fills your soul, that lifts your spirit and no one can ever take that from you. You know that your time will come and you don't really care when because you committed yourself to this passion.

You are an ACTOR!!!

For more: <http://www.alaneramos.com/prose--musings---meanderings.html>

## EACH DAY

By Alan E. Ramos

Each day is singularly unique; however, each day has within it:  
discovery; a smile; a bit of joy; love; knowledge;  
wonderment; astonishment; happiness; friendship;  
bliss; success; a frown; anger; hate; stupidity;  
ignorance; discouragement; frustration; failure;  
and on and on and on . . . .

In each day we face many decisions:  
Do we smile or do we frown; do we love or do we  
hate; do we find knowledge and celebrate with  
wonderment and astonishment, or; do we wallow  
in ignorance and stupidity; frustration and failure?

These are the decisions we make each and every day. How  
goes each day depends on the decisions we make. If the  
day is grey and rainy, do we let the grey bring us to our  
knees in sadness or do we acknowledge that just above  
the clouds the sun shines brightly and the sky is azure blue.

Our choices are simple: feel the love or give in to the hate;  
embrace the happiness and seek success or let discouragement  
and frustration show us only failure.

Some days it is difficult to see the choices, but the choices  
are there nonetheless. Embrace them, feel them and never let  
them out of your reach. Each day is your day, your choice,  
your life. Live it!!!

### *Dots New . . .*

Just received my copy of the April 2012 edition (Yes, 2012) of the California Bar eJournal; – there’s no news like old news . . . RIP Don Rickles; miss you already you hockey puck . . . I am truly concerned that I might not be able to keep my driver’s license; I hope that the DMV overlooks the many complaints that must have filed against me for using my turn signal (to turn AND change lanes), letting people merge into my lane, and even stopping at stop signs. I know, I know, I’m in LA -- I’m trying to change . . . Thank you VW – you bought back my Passat TDI, but you never let the DMV know that you own it. Apparently, you don’t even know you own it – you sent me a recall notice. Why should I be surprised, after all you’ve done so well on that emissions thing . . . I was just fondly reminiscing about the olden days (pre-2016) when Facebook was filled with cat videos and peoples’ vacation photos; ah, those were simpler times . . . .

## *The View from Murray's World*

The following news, views, comments and/or opinions are from the mind of Murray Richards, formerly the anchor of the award-winning (questionable??) news team on the now-defunct Bankruptcy Television Network. Murray's views and opinions are those of the author alone, considering that they are not shared by many, if any, other living human being.

There is a rumor around that Murray has been selected as the winner of some sort of award or is the subject of some acclaim. As hard as that is to believe, we are checking out the rumor and we will get back to you in the next edition. Murray is said to be celebrating with all of his friends (a table for two at a McDonalds??). We found the following on his desk (he claims to have written it, but I remember seeing it as an anonymous posting on FaceBook). Enjoy:

### **A.A.A.D.D.**

Recently, I was diagnosed with A.A.A.D.D. – Age Activated Attention Deficit Disorder. This is how it manifests: I decide to water my garden. As I turn on the hose in the driveway, I look over at my car and decide it needs washing. As I start toward the garage, I notice mail on the porch table that I brought up from the mail box earlier. I decide to go through the mail before I wash the car. I lay my car keys on the table, put the junk mail in the garbage can under the table, and notice that the can is full. So, I decide to put the bills back on the table and take out the garbage first.

But then I think, since I'm going to be near the mailbox when I take out the garbage anyway, I may as well pay the bills first. I take my check book off the table, and see that there is only one check left. My extra checks are in my desk in the study, so I go inside the house to my desk where I find the can of Pepsi I'd been drinking. I'm going to look for my checks, but first I need to push the Pepsi aside so that I don't accidentally knock it over. The Pepsi is getting warm, and I decide to put it in the refrigerator to keep it cold.

As I head toward the kitchen with the Pepsi, a vase of flowers on the counter catches my eye—they need water. I put the Pepsi on the counter and discover my reading glasses that I've been searching for all morning. I decide I better put them back on my desk, but first I'm going to water the flowers. I set the glasses back down on the counter, fill a container with water and suddenly spot the TV remote. Someone left it on the kitchen table. I realize that tonight when we go to watch TV, I'll be looking for the remote, but I won't remember that it's on the kitchen table, so I decide to put it back in the den where it belongs, but first I'll water the flowers. I pour some water in the flowers, but quite a bit of it spills on the floor. So, I set the remote back on the table, get some towels and wipe up the spill. Then, I head down the hall trying to remember what I was planning to do.

At the end of the day: the car isn't washed, the bills aren't paid, there is a warm can of Pepsi sitting on the counter, the flowers don't have enough water, there is still only 1 check in my check book, I can't find the remote, I can't find my glasses, and I don't remember what I did with the car keys. Then, when I try to figure out why nothing got done today, I'm really baffled because I know I was busy all the damn day, and I'm really tired. I realize this is a serious problem, and I'll try to get some help for it, but first I'll check my e-mail....

## *People/Classes/Organizations I Recommend to Actors\**

**Acting Pros – Wendy Davis** – 12-week Audition skills class – a game-changer for me.  
<http://actingpros.com/>

**Auditions to Offers – Emily Grace** – How to build powerful relationships and effectively market yourself. <http://actingpros.com/enroll-in-auditions-to-offers/>

**Aliso Creek Productions – William Williams** – Great training for voice-over work.  
<http://alisocreek.net/>

**Ani Avetyan** – Scene Study Classes by invitation only – Wonderful!  
(Contact Connect Studios LA for more information)

**Anne Marie Scheffler** – Writing Workshop – She convinced me I could write. (She is based in Toronto, but she is in LA from time-to-time) (Contact Connect Studios LA for more information)

**BGB Studios** – Any class that you take will be well worth your while.  
<http://bramongarciabraun.com/>

**Connect Studios LA** – Wonderful Improv classes with Doug and Ayumi – the best!  
<http://www.connectstudiosla.com/>

**Inside Game with Robert & Michelle Colt** – This three-day workshop changed my life!  
<https://www.insidegame.com/>

**Katt Shea** – On-Camera Cold Read classes – Gave me the confidence to walk into any audition, pick up sides and just do it! Great class! <http://www.kattshea.com/>

**Killian's Workshop** – Commercial Classes – If you want to do commercials, don't miss Killian's <https://killians-workshop.myshopify.com/>

\* These are people/classes/organizations with whom/which I have trained. I have no financial interest in these classes/organizations and I make no representation or warranties other than the fact that I have benefited greatly from having taken these classes.

## ***Upcoming Events\****

**National Association of Consumer Bankruptcy Attorneys** – 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference – May 4-7, Orlando, FL

**California Bankruptcy Forum** – 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Insolvency Conference – May 19-21, San Diego, CA

**Commercial Law League** – Eastern Region Conference – September 13 – 17, Atlantic City, NJ

**California State Bar** – Annual Meeting – September 21–22, Los Angeles, CA CalBar Headquarters

**Conference of California Bar Associations** – Annual Conference – October 6 -8, Sacramento, CA

\* This is a listing of upcoming events for organizations to which I belong and/or support (and some I don't). For more information on any of these programs, send an email to me: [aramos@aerlaw.com](mailto:aramos@aerlaw.com)

## ***Great Mediation Training: An Unsolicited Endorsement***

By Alan E. Ramos

I am a firm believer in mediation – to my mind, mediation is more effective (both time and cost) than litigation or arbitration. If you are looking for a mediator, I would appreciate it if you would consider recommending me as a neutral. If you have an interest in becoming a mediator, or you need follow-up training, and you are looking for an excellent source for your training, I strongly recommend Steve Rosenberg. His mediation training program is excellent. His next Mediation Training will be presented in San Rafael on October 4-6 & 11-13, 2017. Steve has also scheduled an Advance Training which will be presented in San Rafael on October 26-27, 2017. For more information about this program (and his advanced mediation training), click on the following link: <http://www.rosenbergmediation.com/> and click on the “Training” button.

## **ALAN E. RAMOS, ESQ.**

Disclaimers:

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