

Pick People Well

“Every day brings new choices.”

Martha Beck

Before there were e-readers, I looked for the books. When we choose jurors for trials, over fifty people stream into the courtroom and take their seats for voir dire. This is when lawyers get to learn a little bit about the jurors, ask them some questions, and then pick our people. It's the only time lawyers get to ask questions of jurors, which is how we choose our jury. Most of my cases have been tried in Philadelphia, and there the jury selection process is short. We have four to eight hours to try to measure a person's heart and mind and decide whether or not he can be fair to our side. It's our only chance to listen to the jurors, before they have to spend days, weeks, or more listening to us. There is never enough time, and every bit of information helps. The book a juror brought with her to jury selection answered some of my questions, so I could use our limited time together to ask others. While it's true that you can't judge a book by its cover, I often did judge a juror by her book. If she was reading John Grisham, she'd want to serve and may think she knew the law as well as the lawyers. If she was reading a school book, she might be distracted during the trial. Books could tell me a lot. E-readers and smartphones have stolen that tool.

There are television shows dedicated to choosing a jury, and people whose careers are based upon helping lawyers choose their juries. Choosing a jury takes skill, but more than that, it takes presence. When the jury panel walks into the room, I put down my phone and my pen, and I observe closely. I try to use as many of my senses as would be socially acceptable (taste and touch are not). I look at the jurors, watching their body language when they interact with one another in the main room, as well as when they come back to the room where the lawyers sit. I listen to their conversations with one another as they wait. If they smell like cigarette smoke, I know that they may bond outside with the other prospective juror who smells like cigarette smoke. Small details become important.

You are choosing people every day. In the past week you may have chosen a date, a doctor, a babysitter, or a barista. You base these choices on convenience, chemistry, your own biases, but also on what your senses tell you. Sight, smell, hearing, and even touch are the cornerstones of good choices. Don't let them go to waste. When it comes time to choose, put down the phone. Ask the kids to read quietly for a bit. Be completely present while you interact with the potential choice. You'll then be able to read the body language, micro-expressions, and tone that allow you to make the best choices.

Next, ask questions. Asking questions gets its own chapter a little later, but for now, rest assured that it's the best way to get the information you need in order to choose. When possible, work ahead of time to determine what questions are most important to your decision. Ask those questions first, then really listen to the answers. When you do, you'll find another question in the answer. Follow up and ask it. The one who asks the most questions wins.

You also have to know when to stop asking, and when to trust the answers. More information helps, until it doesn't. At some point, you must stop collecting information and make a choice.

One of the advantages of picking a jury is that we have to pick. The people who work in City Hall want to go home, so I can't stay there all night second-guessing my decision. I have to do my best, use the information I've acquired by asking questions and observing, and then make a decision. You can and should do the same. Gather your observations, then make a call. Go on the date. Hire the assistant. The great thing about real life is that if you don't like what you've chosen, you can make changes.

In the courtroom, we get what we get, and we can't get upset (unless something pretty major occurs). Fortunately for you, outside the courtroom you have the ability and the right to change your mind. So make your decision, secure in the knowledge that most of the time you can decide again and decide better. Practice picking the best people for the job at hand.

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This excerpt of "The Elegant Warrior: How To Win Life's Trials Without Losing Yourself" is provided by the author. Life is full of trials, and sometimes you need a warrior spirit to overcome them. Award-winning attorney Heather Hansen has spent over twenty years fighting on the battlefields of the courts—but even in her fiercest clashes, she's remained true to herself. She provides expert analysis on television shows like CNN, NBC and Good Day and travels the country as a communication consultant and professional speaker. To purchase her book and learn more about Heather visit <https://heatherhansenpresents.com/books/the-elegant-warrior/>.