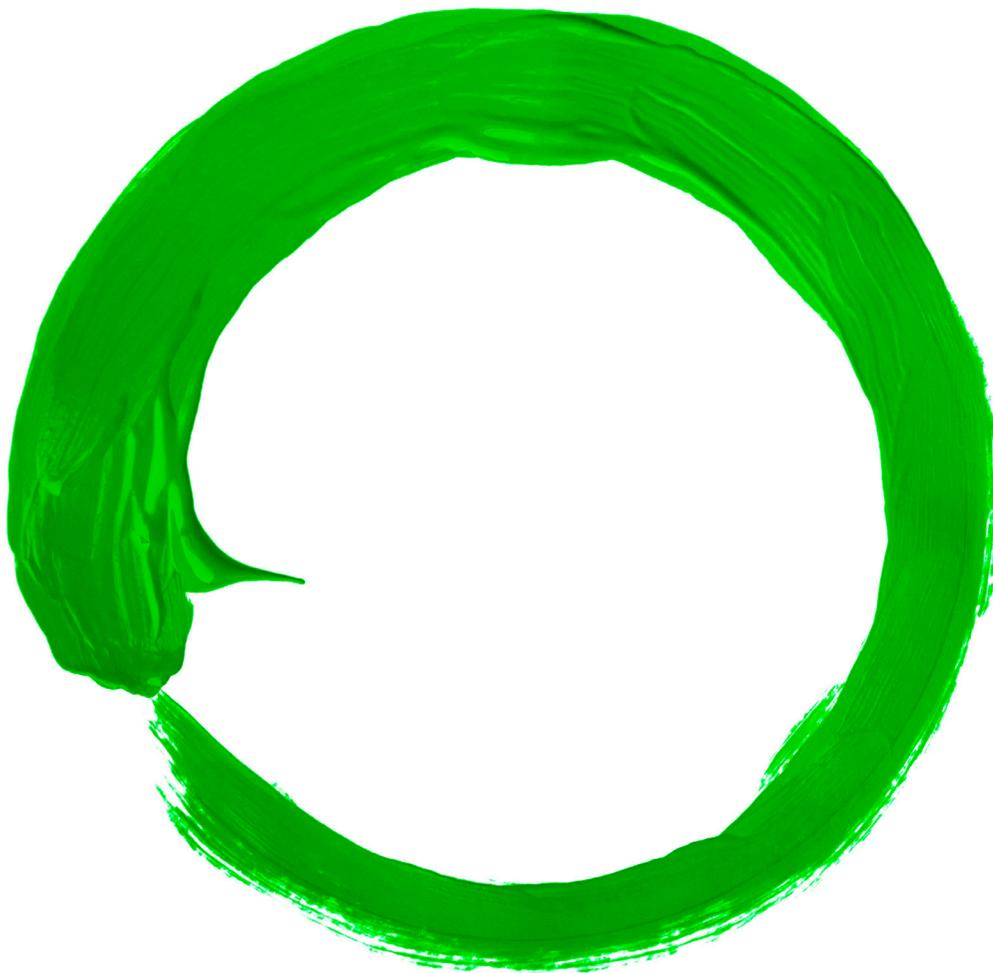


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Building on a Solid Foundation

By Valerie C. Dickerson, Deloitte Tax LLP

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Behind the Board is a series that highlights the milestones, challenges, and lessons members of *Tax Notes State's* advisory board have experienced over the course of their careers.

This installment features Valerie C. Dickerson, a partner and practice leader with Deloitte Tax.

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What was the greatest milestone of your career?

Moving to D.C. from California eight years ago to build a top-tier national multistate practice within Washington National Tax (WNT). Being able to dream what that practice would look like, what it would mean for our firm, to build the team, and to realize that dream has been hugely professionally rewarding. To be able to collaborate with such brilliant professionals has been icing on the cake.

What was the biggest obstacle or challenge you encountered?

If you had asked me two years ago, I would have said moving to D.C. from California eight years ago to build a national multistate practice within WNT. Now, I have to say it has been an even bigger challenge the past 18 months to be part of building Deloitte's new service line, Legal Business Services. This requires me to draw from my business skills on a much larger scale, while at the same time taking very different offerings to the marketplace. It has given me a broader enterprise view to my own firm. Having one foot

in two worlds also gives me a unique view into different aspects of serving our clients. And I get to see other leaders on my team step into broader roles and really shine as our multistate practice within WNT evolves to the legislative trends, tax department trends, and Deloitte marketplace and firm leadership needs. Embracing change forces creativity. I'm not an artist or musician, but I do get to be creative during problem-solving, which is incredibly rewarding.

What do you hope to achieve in the near future?

Personally, it is my family's goal to build a foster family village for orphaned and abandoned children in Sierra Leone, complete with sustainable farming, a medical clinic, and a vocational school to teach marketable skills to the non-college-bound. I believe that the children who will grow up in that village, nurtured and guided in a loving family community environment, will be the part of the fabric of a robust rising middle class in that country with opportunities for them abounding. In collaboration with two other charities operating in Sierra Leone, this month we started building the first foster family home for legal guardian foster parents and their 26 children by this time next year. Sierra Leone is our adopted second country, as two of our daughters were born there. You cannot do everything that needs doing, but this is "the thing" that became our burden to do, and is part of the purpose our family foundation serves.

Professionally, I want to continue to serve clients, whether it's through resolving tough state tax controversies, advising through uncertainty, or relieving some of the pain of legal department obligations. One of my greatest professional joys is to alleviate burden and bring peace of mind to my clients.

What is the most important lesson you've learned?

One of the biggest things I've learned is when to be a technical purist and when to be pragmatic. Those two concepts are not mutually exclusive. I have a deep appreciation for intellectual purity, analyzing an issue from multiple points of view, and reasoning to a conclusion, and there are many times we need to hold ourselves to that rigor. On the other hand, pragmatism goes a long way when you need to forge a straight path forward or operationalize a chosen course of action in the face of uncertainty and lack of guidance. There are no no-risk situations, and since I've always had a bias for action, while I want the purist view, I also want to get to solutions. If it requires pioneering a solution, even if a tougher path, sometimes that is the best way forward.

Do you have any additional thoughts to share?

The last and maybe most important thing that I hope to pass along to my children and those I get to mentor is how much we need other people and how much leading yourself factors into the health of your relationships. Because we work so much in our profession, for me I can really let this area suffer if not attentive to it. Taking care of yourself mentally, physically, and spiritually helps you support your team, your clients, your family, and your relationships. At the end of the day, I want to have served and had meaningful relationships with *real live people*, especially those closest to me, but frankly that extends to everyone with whom I interact. For me, getting back into running, working golf lessons with my son into my schedule, getting outside, and getting deeper in my faith are examples of wonderfully freeing activities that have helped me be present and available to others through this recent trying pandemic season. Beyond taking care of yourself, there is joy and privilege in serving others in the ways in which we are individually, uniquely suited. ■

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