



SOME KEYS TO SUCCESS

FOR YOUNG LAWYERS

BY: ERIC M. WEIHE, YLD CHAIR

With the recent running of the 143rd Kentucky Derby, I was reminded that yet another year has passed since my graduation from the University of Kentucky College of Law. Though I have miles to go to become the lawyer I aspire to someday be, I feel that I have made great strides as a lawyer in my nine years of practice. I attribute my advancement as a lawyer to a number of things. Since we have recently graduated another crop of young lawyers, and will soon be admitting them to the Kentucky Bar, I thought I would share a few of the key things I have learned that have helped me as a young lawyer, in the hope that these keys will be useful to other young lawyers in their careers.

FIND A MENTOR(S)

No matter how well-educated and well-prepared we think we are to practice law coming out of law school, the truth is that we have not yet been through any legal “battles,” or experienced any legal successes or failures from which we can draw upon. It is critically important for all young lawyers to find a more senior lawyer who has been through the legal “battles” who can serve as a sounding board and confidant in guiding the young lawyer. In my experience, lawyers are welcoming and excited to shepherd young lawyers along in their careers. It is important as a young lawyer to get the most out of the mentor/mentee relationships you develop. That includes not being afraid to ask questions, no matter how big or small. Mentoring lawyers will likely not hesitate to fondly recall some of the growing pains they experienced and share lessons learned along the way with their young lawyer mentees, in the hope that their prior experiences can assist the young lawyers in their advancement. I have found that mentoring lawyers take great pride and joy in being a part of helping a “cub” young lawyer grow to become a bear of the Bar. If you as a young lawyer have difficulty finding a mentor, a good place to start is the Kentucky Bar Association’s “Great Place to Start” mentoring program. Details regarding the program can be found on the association’s website at kbagps.org.

WORK HARD

Hard work and dedication are how we all obtained a law degree and licenses to practice law in the first place. There is no doubt that to succeed as a young lawyer, that same hard work and dedication will need to be exhibited. The nature of our profession is such that there are often highs and lows in our workloads. When you are in a high workload period, you cannot be afraid to roll up your sleeves and get to work. You will feel a significant sense of achievement if you know you have put in the hard work to deserve the positive result you achieve. Even if you do not achieve your desired result, you will get consolation in knowing that the result was not due to a lack of effort on your part.

HONOR THE PROFESSION BY PRACTICING WITH CIVILITY

It truly is a great achievement to be a member of the Kentucky Bar. Young lawyers should give the Bar and its lawyers the respect that is deserved by practicing with civility. Your reputation precedes you, and as my mentors aptly remind me, it can take years to develop a good reputation and only one bad day or action to destroy it. It seems so simple and obvious that the Golden Rule should be followed and applied by lawyers in practice. However, too many lawyers (young and old alike), do not practice the Golden Rule and act with civility. This can be detrimental to your practice. You never know when you may require some leniency or a favor from the lawyer with whom you are currently doing battle. If you have always treated that lawyer fairly and with civility, then you are much more likely to have your request honored. Following the Golden Rule will serve all young lawyers well in their practice.

FIND JOY IN WHAT YOU DO

Not every day as a practicing lawyer will be sunshine and roses. However, it is important to find an area of law that you most enjoy, and do everything you can to make that area your primary practice. If polled, I am confident that most lawyers would agree that they are not doing the exact same kind of work today that they were doing the very first day they began practicing law. Do not be afraid to try practicing in new and different areas of law, in order to find what you most enjoy doing.

DO NOT FORGET TO TAKE BREAKS

The practice of law is demanding and can consume your life. At times (e.g., if you are in trial or closing a big deal), this is necessary and unavoidable. However, there must be something that you can turn to in order to take your mind off of the law and decompress. Finding outside interests will provide levity in your life and enable you to have more vigor for your law practice. It is true that being a lawyer is a very noble profession, and even a calling of sorts for many of us. But at the end of the day, it is just a job! Do not let your law practice diminish the other joys in your life, and make sure to always make time for your life outside of work.

Young lawyers, remember that we are vital to the Bar and we are literally the future of the practice of law in Kentucky. I very much look forward to serving as the Young Lawyers Division Chair for the 2017-2018 Bar year.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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