



A Time for Thank Yous

It has been a very short year and a very long year. But most of all, it has been a very enjoyable year. It has been a privilege and an honor to have served as president of the State Bar of Michigan.

As I finish my year as president, I have come to realize it is time for a few thank yous.

- Thank you, first of all, to my fellow officers, Kim Cahill, Ron Keefe, Ed Pappas, and Charles Toy, along with all of the members of the Board of Commissioners. They are not only wonderful board members, they are terrific human beings. The State Bar of Michigan is first and foremost about giving back to our profession and to the community. Although uniquely different, the board members share a common trait: they care deeply... and it shows.
- Thank you to John Berry and the rest of the wonderful State Bar of Michigan staff. One of my greatest pleasures this year has been to work with the staff of the State Bar of Michigan. They are wonderfully dedicated individuals whose foremost goal is doing their best for our membership. Their efforts have been tireless. We are indeed fortunate to have such a professional and hard-working group of individuals working on our behalf.
- Thank you to the members of the Representative Assembly and, in particular, to the Assembly's officers, Lori Buiteweg, Ed Haroutunian, and Bob Gardella. The Assembly's willingness to roll up its sleeves and tackle the difficult issues facing our profession has been exemplary.
- Thank you to the State Bar of Michigan's past presidents. The past presidents have been wonderful leaders of our profession. Each of them, in his or her own way, has been a wonderful mentor and role model for me. They made it easy for me to follow in their footsteps.
- Thank you to the members of the Michigan Supreme Court and the judiciary (both

federal and state). To better our profession, it is extremely important that the bench and bar have an effective and close working relationship. I believe that we have such a relationship, and I thank the judiciary for its support.

- Thank you to all of the members of my law firm, Miller, Canfield, Paddock and Stone, who have so generously supported me in my presidential year. I could not have done what I did this past year without their constant help and assistance. A special thank you goes to our firm's chief executive officer, Thom Linn; the firm's deputy executive officer (and new member of the Board of Commissioners), Beverly Burns; the firm's managing directors, Mike Hartmann, Brad Arbuckle, Rick Gaffin, Anna Maiuri, and Jerome Watson; my group leader, Clarence Pozza; my litigation colleagues, Matt Leitman, Gerry Gleeson, Dave O'Brien, Saul Green, Michael Gordner, Jeff Rogg, Irene Bruce Hathaway, Matt Allen, Hideaki Sano, and Jennifer Sabourin; and to numerous others who were there to pick up every ball I was about to drop.
- A heartfelt thank you to my assistants, Lori Rouman and Caroline Christenson, and to Alisha Kaszubski for their tremendous organizational skills and ever-patient support of me.
- I want to thank the members of my family, my lovely wife, Maria, and my wonderful children, Jackie, Taylor, and Chase, for their endless love and support. I am indeed a very fortunate husband and father.

- Finally, I want to thank all of the members of the State Bar of Michigan. Wherever I went this past year, I was warmly welcomed and received. The graciousness of everyone that I met helped to remind me that I love being a lawyer and being with lawyers.

Undoubtedly, there are some thank yous that I have overlooked. I trust that those I have momentarily forgotten know how much their efforts and support have been appreciated. My final debt of gratitude goes to everyone who has been kind enough to have provided this wonderful opportunity for me to serve as president. My thank you to you comes in the form of sharing with you what is, for me, one of the most memorable "President's Page" columns I have ever read. In September 1995, Jon R. Muth, a past president of the State Bar of Michigan, wrote an extraordinary "President's Page." That Jon would write such an extraordinary column is not surprising since he is an extraordinary individual. Before his son, Jeff, headed off to law school, Jon wrote him a letter. In his letter, Jon shared his thoughts on the practice of law and what it means to be a Good Lawyer. For those new lawyers who have never read Jon's letter, you are in for an extraordinary treat. For those more "experienced" lawyers, Jon's letter will likely be familiar but certainly worth re-reading. Enjoy.

A Letter to My Son

Dear Jeff,

I can comprehend only with difficulty the fact that you are contemplating the start of

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law school. It seems like yesterday that I sat for the first time in Property Law class being introduced to and somewhat shaken by the nuances of the Socratic Method. The passage of almost 25 years in the law has been swift. My first office, my first assignment, my first client are fixed in my mind. Yet during these years much has happened, much has changed.

I am often asked whether I have encouraged my sons to consider a career in law. I respond that I have not, at least consciously so. The choice of career for you and for Dan must be an individual selection. It must be a course that is important to you. It must offer the potential to become much more than a task and a paycheck. Now, however, since your own direction may point to a career in the law, I dare to offer a few reflections.

To start, any prospective law student must make a realistic appraisal of the profession before committing three years of education and tens of thousands of dollars to a law degree. The profession is neither as glamorous as portrayed on television nor as lucrative as imagined by its aspirants. Recent surveys reveal that a high percentage of lawyers would not re-enter the profession today. While that view may be attributable in part to the principle of "greener pastures," another part is certainly a reflection of well-recognized problems or unrealistic expectations. The work is hard and often routine. The public esteem for lawyers is low. Stress is high. Median compensation will not provide a high standard of living. Jobs, especially the jobs most law students desire, are difficult to find. If a good job is obtained, competition to keep it will be intense. Even if a highly desired partnership is achieved, your economic success will depend heavily upon your ability to compete with other partners, firms, and providers of law-related services. The law is much more a business than it was and much less a profession. Gentility and civility are sometimes lost to overzealous advocacy.

Perhaps of most concern is that success, if achieved, may come at the expense of other things of importance to you. Finding a sense of balance will be a lifelong struggle as you try to integrate work with family and friends, with public and professional service, with intellectual growth and with personal recreation. The more ambitious the professional

goals, the greater the danger that something significant will suffer by their attainment.

Knowing that a career in the law, or any other field, is no guarantee of a meaningful life, it is important to think far beyond the degree, the bar exam, and the first job. You must think *now* about the *kind* of lawyer you want to become. You must assess how that lawyer relates to the person you wish to be, the reputation you wish to enjoy, and the broader life you wish to lead.

No new lawyers are needed simply to add to the available pool. One could even argue we might do better with fewer. But there is always room for another Good Lawyer. By that I mean a lawyer grounded in a sense of public service, rooted in ethical behavior, committed to civility, infused with the principles underpinning the lawyers' constructive role in society, determined to discharge his or her responsibilities with class and integrity, desirous of melding life and law into a common connected purposeful destiny.

If your goal is to become that Good Lawyer, the law can provide a wonderful, challenging, exciting, humane, invigorating, and deeply satisfying career. Great success can be achieved with or without financial gain. Conversely, if a commitment to professionalism is lacking, economic success alone cannot stave off personal failure.

While much of what is popularly portrayed about lawyers is illusory, many facets of the profession not often depicted are real and of great value. The law offers a number of advantages that can be realized by anyone willing to make the required commitment.

The law offers a sense of personal worth. A hallmark of professionalism is a dedication to the affairs of others and a willingness to suppress self-interest. You will have the opportunity to help people deal with the complexities of modern life, ameliorate frustration and anger, and solve vexing problems that inhibit productive activity. You can represent those without means in order to preserve the value of "equal justice under law." You will bear for a time a burden too heavy for another. You can stem the tears, alleviate the concern, and right the wrong. You will speak for those who cannot do so effectively. You can search for truth and find justice. The very act of such service can be a source of fulfillment.

The law will provide the opportunity to put your full education to use in creative ways.

The Good Lawyer knows not only the law, but knows something of psychology, science, sociology, history, political theory, literature, and philosophy. Your learning will extend beyond books and ideas to people and relationships. You must be open to new experiences, different people, and new ideas. Your career should push you to continue learning long after any formal education is complete. As you grow in breadth of knowledge and depth of understanding, your horizons will expand. At any stage and at any age, the law can keep you intellectually alive, vibrant, and young.

The law always provides a challenge. It can be the challenge of competition in a case or transaction. It can be the effort to reach beyond mere competition to find mutual support and connectedness in dispute resolution. It can be the need to change and adapt one's career. It should be the continuing need to articulate the role of the lawyer in society. It can be the challenge of generating change within ourselves, our profession, our justice system in order to progressively respond to societal need. It can be the process of growing old in the law with dignity and honor.

The law provides great opportunity for involvement and leadership. Lawyers have always been in the forefront in their communities. Whether it is in the churches, the service organizations, the arts, politics, the Chamber of Commerce, or Little League, lawyers play significant roles. We know that making our living from our communities engenders an obligation to pay something back. No matter what the reputation of lawyers generally, our communities seek out for leadership and honor with their esteem individuals who make a commitment to public service.

The law gives focus to the desire to lead an ethical and moral life. No profession offers more opportunities to make ethical judgments—or misjudgments. Ethical behavior is not a matter of theory, but of daily consequence. Because our role is that of a fiduciary, obligating us to place others' interests ahead of our own, the seduction of self-interest places heavy demands on our resolve. When I entered upon a career in the law, I could not imagine that I would be required to so closely and often examine my own conduct to assure that it comports with my principles. I have not always been successful in welding conduct to conscience



and, where I have failed, a scar is left on my memory. But where I have succeeded there is a feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction that would, for me, be impossible to replicate in another endeavor.

The law is integral to the life of our society. We are heirs to a cherished tradition that honors constitutional processes, rule by law, equal justice under law, and the independence of the bench and bar. Our future depends upon the preservation of these principles. It depends on our ability to peacefully adapt to new realities and modalities. In a political system dependent upon law for authority laws proliferate; as laws proliferate so do lawyers. As complex and messy as it all can be, the alternatives to the rule of law are singularly unattractive. Social issues in the United States will continue to find their way to the courts for resolution. Courts will continue to wrestle with matters of great moment. For that task, Good Lawyers are essential.

Any career path is an uncertain journey. It is much enhanced, indeed made understandable, if approached with a sense of personal vision and destiny. When a career dovetails with an approach to all living, joined by principle and purpose, life itself acquires meaning. To become a Good Lawyer is a worthy goal.

It will not be easy. Good reputation is never bought or staged, it is earned. Living your career in the manner I describe will require courage, integrity, and hard work. The process must be its own reward, because in the end the only things we take with us are our character and reputation.

I write this letter with a sense of passage. As you think about beginning law school and what that means, I depart as president of the State Bar of Michigan. One of the many positive features of my recent experience has been the opportunity to stand away from the daily routine and think about a broader vision of my profession. I love being a law-

yer. I like being in the company of lawyers. I now better understand why.

In foregoing my own understanding I have tried to challenge other Michigan lawyers to think in terms of their responsibility to the profession and the public over the long term—even to a future seventh generation. When I have been critical of lawyers and institutions, it has been out of a deep sense of the importance of what we do and a commitment to being the best we can be for the society we serve. Perhaps some of my experience can be of benefit to you in finding your own direction. It will be unique, of course, for you are a unique person, possessing talents and abilities different from and sometimes greater than mine. If a bit of the “Old Man” has rubbed off, I know you can build upon it and better it. We then have only six generations to go.

Love,
Dad ♦
