

A Few New Year's Promises



John T. Berry

It is the New Year, the traditional time for resolutions. But resolutions come and go as fast as pleasant winter weather in Michigan. What I want to talk about is something more enduring, more like a resolution dressed up in adult clothes—a *promise*. We all know about promises from Contracts 101. Making promises is important. It can mean commitment, good intentions, focus, and dedication to effort and accountability.

Keeping promises is tougher. Unforeseen circumstances can intervene, intentions can wobble. Broken promises almost surely bring a greater loss of credibility and trust than the safety of silence or whispered hopes.

The value of a sincere promise is that it focuses us on the important commitments in life and holds us answerable to those who rely upon and care about the assurance we give.

To be worth anything, promises must be mostly within the province of the one making that promise. I'd like to promise world peace, but I can't control that other than to work earnestly to do my part. I can promise

to feed my cat on time, and I do so in part for her sake and in part for relief for my wife and myself from her incessant meowing.

But the best promises to keep are those that are made freely, without pressure, and are motivated by a belief in and commitment to the results that keeping the promise will bring.

Here, then, are my promises to you, those to whom my professional life is devoted:

Bar Members

- I promise to go and listen to any section, local bar, or other gathering of lawyers at your request.
- I promise to watch our budget in such a way as to demonstrate financial responsibility. That means not only starting with a balanced budget, but doing all I can to keep it that way.
- I promise next month to publish in this *Journal* and on the State Bar website the most professional, comprehensive annual report with audited financial statements that this Bar has ever produced.
- I promise to publish the most thoroughly reviewed *Bar Journal* directory ever, in an attempt to insure fewer mistakes than the last several years. (With hundreds of thousands of data entries, I can't promise perfection, but I can promise extraordinary effort aimed at perfection.)
- I promise to champion our strategic plan and to devote my particular expertise to its

Promise. A declaration which binds the person who makes it, either in honor, conscience, or law, to do or forbear a certain specific act, and which gives to the person to whom made a right to expect or claim the performance of some particular thing. A declaration, verbal or written, made by one person to another for a good or valuable consideration, in the nature of a covenant by which the promisor binds himself to do or forbear some act, and gives to the promisee a legal right to demand and enforce a fulfillment. An express undertaking, or agreement to carry a purpose into effect....

—*Black's Law Dictionary*

commitment to help you in the practice of law. In that regard, I personally promise to have readied a new diversion program for the discipline system, which helps lawyers with law office management and handling stress. In addition, I promise to develop within that program practical and useful ways to recognize and deal with reasonable client dissatisfaction.

Section Members

- I promise to work closely with you to bring clarity to our proper roles and to spend more time with you than any executive director has before.

Local Bar Leaders

- I promise to work more closely with you in order to help us both succeed. In short, I promise to treat you as partners in service to our members, not as competitors.

Bar Staff

- I promise to lead by example in work ethic and dedication in service to our members.
- I promise to speak loudly to get you the help you need to do your jobs and to help each of you to grow professionally.
- I promise to lead by having a grateful, thankful attitude to our members for our opportunity to serve no matter how hard the challenge.

For a promise to be worth anything, the effort that goes into its keeping must be commensurate with its difficulty, and its achievement must be measurable. My last promise is to report back to you on my success or failure in keeping these promises.

I wish you a happy and prosperous New Year. ♦

Share your
thoughts/concerns

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