

Good People with a Shared Vision and Adequate Resources



John T. Berry

Much of importance has happened in the life of the State Bar of Michigan and in my life since my last article. Those events can be categorized into good people, shared visions, and adequate resources.

Good People

The starting point for any goal is to have good people involved in the journey. Let me describe two people who differ in many ways but who both have exemplified the kind of good people I've been blessed to be associated with in my career.

First is Bethany Smith. She was a beautiful person who died February 7, 2002 after a courageous battle with cancer. She enjoyed her life and the people in her life to the fullest. With so many people in the world finding reasons to complain about work, she kept working with us until most others would have given up. Each day she was here, she brightened the lives of those around her with her smile, wonderful sense of humor, and enthusiasm. She died too young, but she lived each day as an example to all around her, giving hope and encouragement to us all.

We mourn Bethany's death, but we celebrate her life. I will always remember her and pay tribute to her by trying to live each day to

the fullest with the goal of making life easier for those around me.

At the recent American Bar Association House of Delegates meeting, I was privileged to be around another great human being who has brought distinction upon himself and our State Bar. I was proud of being part of the State Bar of Michigan's delegation to the ABA's House of Delegates as we walked Dennis Archer to the podium for his acceptance speech as the ABA's president-designate, the first African American to hold that office. He made us proud with a moving speech that highlighted for me his tremendous dedication of service to our profession.

These two people crossed all of our lives at the State Bar, each in their own way reminding us that good people surrounding us make us all better, whether as individuals or as professionals. All of us at the State Bar have been positively affected by the lives of these two fine people.

I want to share one other comment about good people. Your staff at the State Bar are good people. I've served as their executive director for 14 months. In many ways, it has not been the easiest of times. Serious fiscal constraints have required the elimination of several positions, causing us to lose people with years of dedication to the Bar and adding to the responsibilities of the remaining staff. They have had to increase their already considerable efforts to serve you, the lawyers of this state, and they are meeting the challenge.

Some tough times still are ahead in order to win your confidence in the Bar's vision and its fiscal responsibility. To each of the staff, I give thanks. They welcomed me with open arms, and I hope with their help we will become the best bar in this nation. It starts with good people, and we have them.

Vision—Healing Our Profession

In past articles, our Bar presidents and I have kept you updated on the Bar's new strategic plan. It is a plan focused on healing our profession. It is a plan to help define our profession, stand up for it, and protect it. It is a plan to help you better earn a living with a little bit more joy along the way.



Bethany Smith

June 1, 1969–February 7, 2002

We will continually update you on the status of our efforts to im-

plement diversion plans for discipline, law office management programs, increased emphasis on defining our profession and improving it, technology innovations, and finding ways for more of our citizens to access our system of justice.

A major component of the strategic plan is to institute fiscal responsibility and controls to earn your trust that your dues money is well spent.

Adequate Resources

With the goal of fiscal responsibility comes accountability. We must demonstrate to you that every cent of your dues money is devoted to the purposes you require and need. We will do that.

In my time here, I've observed a Bar that is nine years removed from its last dues increase but a Bar not prepared to ask for another cent until its house was put in order, both fiscally and strategically. We will again this next budget year cut costs, implement new restraints, and plan for the program shifts you have asked for.

We will not be asking for a dues increase in October 2002, though after ten years none of us can live with the same dollars we lived with ten years ago. Any changes beyond that will be based upon the input from you about our programs and future needs. We are making more time for us all to work together to forge a well-planned and adequately resourced Bar.

Fourteen months after becoming your executive director, I continue to feel blessed to serve in this state beside good people. Whether Republicans or Democrats, ABA presidents, or the most precious of our young talent, as exemplified by Bethany, together we will make this a better Bar. My primary focus in the upcoming months will be to help unite us so we can stand together in healing this profession and making earning our livelihood a bit more fun. ♦