

President's Message

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Happy Law Day!

THE MONTH OF May brings several fun and fascinating law-related activities to the forefront for many of us, and I take this opportunity to extend to all our members the best wishes of the Federal Bar Association at this time of the year. During this month, I

hope that you, your chapter, or your section will engage in a special activity or program to recognize the importance of the law to the vitality and strength of our country.

Three very special events in which I will have the opportunity to participate occur this month as well. Executive Director Jack Lockridge and I are participating in a panel discussion at the 67th Conference of the Sixth Judicial Circuit of the United States. For the second year in a row, I have the privilege to appear before the U.S. Supreme Court to move the admission of FBA lawyers at the U.S. Supreme Court Bar Admissions ceremony sponsored by the Younger Lawyers Division. And I will be attending the Capitol Hill Chapter's annual Supreme Court luncheon, which this year features an address by Chief Justice John Roberts.

May is also graduation time for law students around the country. I have the honor of delivering the commencement address at Stetson University's College of Law in Florida. Graduates typically expect a commencement speaker to offer pearls of wisdom about life, career, and the profession. I'm not sure that what I have to share with these graduates meets those standards, but, as someone who has been in the profession for 31 years and has seen it from many different angles, I do have some perspectives that I hope will be helpful to them in some way. Perhaps LaForge's Top Ten New Lawyer Tips will be helpful and instructive to law school graduates and to younger lawyers in your sphere of influence. Here they are:

1. Make your first career stop count.

For most of you, your next stop in life—the first serious position in your career—will teach you how to be the lawyer you're going to be in a practical sense. Not that you can't and won't make career shifts throughout your life—you most likely will. But that first stop is almost always a vital one. Choose it carefully.

2. Specialize.

Be really good at something and be well-known for it. Put yourself to the task of becoming an expert

in some field—any field. But do it. You can move around professionally and expand your endeavors all you want, but develop a specialty early on.

3. The law doesn't need you.

At first blush, this may sound provocative or harsh—and it should. In the final analysis, the law really *doesn't* need you, but people do. Your clients will need you, and so will the principals of a company, a nonprofit organization, a public-interest group, or other institutions you might represent or counsel. The rule of law, as we know it, will prevail and do just fine without you, unless you happen to be fortunate enough to serve on a high appellate court or to argue a landmark case before one. But your clients may not prevail in the system of that rule of law without you. *That's* where you can make a difference. The law as a discipline requires skill sets that you have begun to learn in law school. Keep learning and applying those skills for those you serve and be passionate about doing so.

4. Be proud and secure in your chosen profession.

The law is a noble calling, profession, and career. Practice your trade with intensity, passion, skill and, above all, integrity. Be proud of being a lawyer. But be prepared for a split personality world out there, because our culture has a love-hate relationship with lawyers. There are those who will revere, admire, respect, and need you and the counsel and services you provide. On the other hand, there will be those who, for a number of reasons—some understandable, many wrong, wrong-minded, or misguided—will demonstrate a disdain for our profession that sometimes, unfortunately, translates into a dislike of or contempt for lawyers of all stripes.

While we as a profession and you as a lawyer most assuredly will continue to have detractors, you should always strive to plow a straight and narrow path in your career—one that is well within the bounds of the



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law, ethics, and propriety.

As for those who ridicule you as a lawyer—who belittle our profession—don't dignify the invalid criticism, don't be dismissive, and don't even be annoyed. Just do everything in your power—through personal and professional example—to demonstrate the goodness and value and worth of the profession, as well as your own personal honesty, character, and integrity. In the final analysis, these aspects—not your final grade in constitutional law, not your success before a jury, not your prowess as a drafting artist—are your real stock in trade and the pillars of your reputation as a lawyer and as a professional.

5. Hear the call to service and heed it.

Be community-minded and civic-minded and willingly engage in activities. Seriously consider public service, a calling that has long been populated by the lawyers of America.

You will be looked to as a “go to person” because you are a lawyer. It comes with the territory, so you had better be well-prepared and you had better conduct yourself according to the highest standards of professional conduct.

Because you are a lawyer, you will be called upon by your church, your neighborhood, your PTA board—virtually every organization with which you are affiliated and even beyond—to give of your talents. Because you are a lawyer—because you can understand and draft bylaws, because you can represent your group's interest, because you can communicate your organization's message, because you can advocate for your group's case and position—you will be asked and you will be expected to do these things. And most of these activities will be voluntary—not even pro bono service—just the act of contributing your professional talents for a common good.

Your skill sets and your professional abilities will be vital in your career track, of course, but they will also be tested and in great demand again and again in community, charitable, and other voluntary settings as well. Give of your talents freely, for you will have only one life in which to give them, and you have total control in the giving in these circumstances.

6. Be engaged in the bar.

Don't just join a bar, get involved in its activities. Your talents and leadership are needed in our bar associations, and you will derive great benefits from your participation—networking, professional development, and the opportunity to refine your skills.

As national president of the Federal Bar Association, I tell any lawyer in private or government practice who has a focus on the federal courts and federal jurisprudence that the FBA is your rightful home among bar associations. My reasons for joining the FBA more than 30 years ago were the same reasons young law-

yers give for joining today: networking among peers, involvement in continuing legal education and other programs that enhance professional development, an opportunity not just to join but also to participate in and take advantage of leadership within chapters, sections, and the national organization itself.

My work in the Federal Bar Association over many years has proven to be very rewarding in many ways. The quality lawyers I have met, the opportunity to give back as all lawyers should, and the chance to make ideas work and help put progressive change in place through personal leadership have all enriched my life in ways far beyond any contributions I may have made.

Find a bar affiliation that works for you, and nurture it.

7. Be more than a lawyer—be a leader.

Be a leader in the bar and in other community capacities as well. In being a leader, use the skills and instincts you have developed through life's experience, including your undergraduate and legal education, to advance sound interests and to make this world better—in however small a way, case by case—by being a principled leader and giving of yourself.

In his wise book of yesteryear, *Pyramid Climbers*, Vance Packard noted that leaders are bright men (and women); they know how to get along; they have drive; they set goals; they make the best of what they get; and, they're not content to sit still.

I think a leader must have a philosophy in life; must understand people; must be empathetic and unselfish; must be principled; must set the pace; must have a commitment to an idea or a cause and a desire to be of service. A good leader must have the capacity for building and maintaining quality and for stimulating ideas and motivating others to action.

And remember that, as a leader and especially as a lawyer who is a leader, you will no longer be judged by ordinary standards. More will be expected of you—and rightfully so.

The final test of one's leadership is the legacy left to others to have the knowledge, conviction, and will to carry on. If you measure yourself by that standard, you can't go wrong.

8. Be a good problem solver.

You have the tools, now use them. In your work and throughout your career, add value to outcomes that have your name attached to them. Knowing and applying the law and its various rules are vital to our profession, of course. But you should master the facts, see issues through human eyes—not just the words of a code or a precedent—and look for remedies and solutions that heal as well as solve or dispose of a case.

9. Know what you're looking for.

Today's law graduates are a fascinating demographic study, and the "read" on you is an important consideration as you map out your professional future. For the most part, this year's law class comprises members of the so-called Generation Y (individuals born after 1975) and possibly a few members of Generation X (those born between 1965 and 1975). You and your peers around the country make up 41 percent of the overall population of the United States today, and you represent 26 percent of the working-age population. You are the workforce of today and tomorrow.

The Silent Generation (born between 1926 and 1945) is growing more silent every day, and my own generation and others in the Baby Boomer group (born between 1946 and 1964) are retired or nearing retirement.

Sociologists and demographers characterize the legal profession as one of the so-called high-end idea professions, in which participants, such as you, seek and expect a heavy dose of entrepreneurship, creativity, and individuality throughout your career. We are told that your generation rightfully wants more information and deeper involvement. You have greater expectations about your affiliations in life and what returns they can provide for you. And you not only embrace a high-tech world around you, you also desire a "high-touch" culture that facilitates personal connection, engagement, and networking.

Research indicates that you and your peer group are adamant about nailing this high-tech and high-touch combination—the blend of technological innovation, online services, and the like (much as the items you carry around in your pocket or purse) with professional activity that is filled with human meaning and interaction, including the existence of key relationships, networking, and the opportunity to contribute and serve. The high-tech aspect is more or less assumed or expected, but the latter—high-touch—is the more important of the two. It will be a major distinguishing factor in your career and professional decisions, and it should be.

Your generation is seeking and will measure career moves and affiliations by the services and returns you receive from a professional endeavor or organization you join; the accountability of value-added features through those relationships; career advantages that are available to you; a sense of community and networking; and opportunities to serve.

For this information, I must extend special thanks to Arthur C. Brooks, associate professor of public administration at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University. I am grateful for the research and advice he has provided the Federal Bar Association in connection with the work of the Task Force on the Future of the FBA and for permission to cite his research findings and statistics in this column.

10. Live up to your end of the bargain.

Let's assume that you find this "perfect storm" com-

ination. What's the quid pro quo? What's your end of the deal as a new lawyer bursting into our profession and the nation's workforce? Whether or not your personal experience bears any resemblance to the demographic categorizations and forecasts, my question to you is this: What will you give back? What are you going to bring to the table? And what value and worth will your contribution carry beyond your own personal benefit?

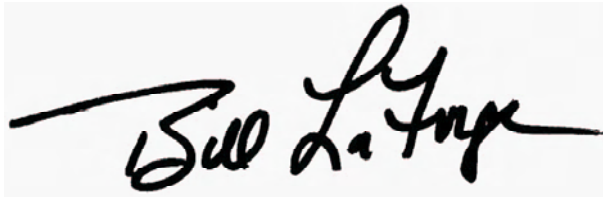
I respectfully suggest some "give-backs" for your consideration:

- intensity in whatever you do professionally,
- honesty in all your dealings,
- passion about your field of practice or area of specialization,
- compassion toward people—especially those less fortunate than you are,
- good decision making and sound judgment,
- volunteerism,
- generosity—with your time as well as your dollars—to worthwhile causes,
- community and bar involvement,
- leadership in all its forms, and, finally,
- added value to any enterprise to which you commit yourself.

And I must admit that I'm kind of partial to the core values held dear by my own firm, Winstead. They are the following: teamwork, excellence, personal growth, respect, integrity, dependability, intensity, service, and commitment. Happy Law Day! **TFL**

Editorial Policy

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