



President's Perspective

WE REALLY DO THINK AND ACT AS LAWYERS SHOULD

By Amy Noe Dudas

PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

When COVID hit, the Indiana State Bar Association was in the middle of putting together its next strategic plan. The planning process already had begun to reveal what ISBA members and non-members wanted, expected, and valued from membership organizations, and the pandemic shifted attitudes in ways that were yet (and remain) unknown. But when the report was released to the Board of Governors in late 2020, it was clear lawyers value connecting with others who think and are like them, who seek out knowledge and enjoy collaborating with others, and who place a high level of importance on being involved in influencing the future of the practice of law.

I joined the ISBA as a law student, although at the time I was not particularly interested in making connections with other law students or lawyers. I worked during the day, commuted to IU McKinney (before it was McKinney) for evening classes, and did not need a job post-admission. However, after I began my practice, I sought out opportunities for engagement with other lawyers. While my local bar is filled with terrific people who are involved in the community in their own way, it's not particularly organized or intentionally structured as a member organization. As a result, I looked to the



ISBA to make the professional connections I craved.

I was nominated to be a district representative on the Board of Governors around my fifth year of practice and found myself surrounded by a group of highly engaged and incredibly foresighted colleagues who welcomed a fairly young and unseasoned lawyer. I became good friends with women and men who were old enough to be my parents, or at least young aunts and uncles. I was included in brainstorming, discussions, and debates, without any trace of condescension due to my naïve optimism or inexperience. Even though the insecurities of youth often prevented me from asking "dumb" questions, these mentors¹ treated me with grace and tact when I often clearly didn't know what I was talking about.

It was mainly for that reason I continued to say "yes" to anything anyone asked me to do with the ISBA. Not only did this work help me feel intellectually engaged in bigger issues than I would deal with in my own practice, but it also gave my heart and soul the connections I needed to find satisfaction in the human race.

All the above seems in some ways to conflict with what I've learned about lawyer

personalities. Painting with a broad brush: We tend to prefer intellectual interactions to emotional ones, we're prone to cynicism and judgment such that we rarely give others the benefit of the doubt, and we're relatively autonomous in both our personal and professional worlds. But, as you'll see later, I think other qualities we share are not a result of, but an improvement on these other traits.

Back in March, I joined other women lawyers at the ISBA Women's Bench Bar Retreat, the first of which I attended all alone as a brand-new baby lawyer back in 2001 in one of my first efforts to network. I met some women there I still consider good friends, most of whom return for the retreat year after year. In fact, at this most recent one, I chatted with Lisa (whom I met at the 2001 retreat) about how our paths likely never would have crossed but for our attendance at this event. To this day, I consider her one of my dearest lawyer friends and know I can call her up for just about anything.

I knew all of that, but this year I gained different yet similar insight about my lawyer colleagues. Not only have I personally experienced kindness, grace, and a sincere willingness to engage lawyer-to-lawyer, I was thrilled to realize this phenomenon also extends to engagement with non-lawyers.

oneself in a room full of lawyers when you project that you have nothing in common with them could be intimidating. The most common question Andy is asked is: "Are you a lawyer, too?" And when he answers in the negative and explains that he works with me in a support role as driver, errand-runner, plumber-

"You've been perceptive, compassionate, respectful, tactful, attentive, emotionally mature, patient, conscientious, humble, observant, resourceful, self-aware, curious, passionate, flexible, and kind."

My husband, Andy, is my partner in the truest sense of the word and he accompanies me to almost every bar event I attend. He's not a lawyer. Heck, he's not even a college graduate. For many, finding

caller, shopper, cook, BFF, and all-around provider of compliments and praise, the reactions from you, my colleagues, are not awkward but rather express genuine delight. This revelation does not stop you in your



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tracks. Instead, you dig in and seek to learn more.

More than once, as Andy navigated a room of women lawyers filled with confidence and poise, I have found one or more of you actively engaged in deep conversation with him. I listened as you asked him pointed questions about his creative writing, offered constructive (and welcome) feedback and genuine encouragement, and even challenged him in non-threatening ways. Kim pushed him to finish his “elevator speech” describing his work, and Aarti thoughtfully dove into ideas about a deeper theme.

My friends, you inspired him with your curiosity, kindness, and sincere desire to connect.

As I observed this with pride in my friends and colleagues, I looked

back on the past several years and realized Andy has always come away from these kinds of engagements with the same sense of inclusion that was extended to me by those at the March retreat.

I've referenced before the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System's Foundations for Practice, which pared down to five broad categories the traits needed by lawyers, each of which were broken down into several skills and qualities. Many of these qualities are not taught in law school, but rather are already a part of who we are as those driven to the profession, and perhaps some of them are learned as we gain wisdom with experience.

Through these interactions not only with other lawyers but also with nonlawyers, I see in my colleagues

many of those qualities and feel confident the good among us do learn them at some point. You've been perceptive, compassionate, respectful, tactful, attentive, emotionally mature, patient, conscientious, humble, observant, resourceful, self-aware, curious, passionate, flexible, and kind.

For that, I thank you and remain ever grateful for the lifelong friendships I have formed. 

FOOTNOTES:

1. You know who you are, Melissa, Carol, Bill, Andi, Mitch, Jim, Marianne, Tom, Patty, Connie, Doug, Susan, Rod (RIP, my friend), Kris, and countless others.