

Becoming a Different Kind of Lawyer: A Call to Action

*Concluding Remarks
delivered by John E. Moore, III, Esq.
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Atticus Finch lost that case. His client was wrongfully convicted...and yet, as we just saw, he earned the respect of his community because he chose to stand up for those who needed a defense...he chose to be a Different Kind of Lawyer...

How will you choose? How will you make the fundamental choice that will guide your career?

On the one hand, you can choose to spend your professional life in pursuit of a series of basically self-serving behaviors that I have today labelled "Winning".

On the other hand, you can choose to spend your professional life as a whole person in service to others...in pursuit of justice...in the manner our profession was designed.

Let me set the scene for how that choice will unfold.

There are 198 of you here today. 198 newly-constructed ocean-going sailing vessels fresh from the boatyard of your undergraduate years.

You are in a safe harbor here. You are here to prepare yourselves for a trip into open seas, as David Brooks put it this morning. We have talked today about using your time here to grow as a person...to know yourself, to understand the professional landscape, to make the most of where you are, to draft your first Professional Development Plan, to build your Professional Compass and to take responsibility for the profession...you can do all of that here while safely buffered from the real world.

Your time here is not a competition with each other but, rather, only with yourself. Your professors will expect a lot from you. But, this effort is nothing you cannot handle and is not new: you have worked hard to get here. Your competition, if you will, is to push yourself to find those opportunities that allow the best version of yourself to come forward in the practice of law...in loyalty to your clients and to the system...every day.

There is not another prize to be won. No brass ring other than to use your time here to figure out the path that works best for you. Your path is unique and, because of that, there are no limits on the number of opportunities available to each of you.

There is no race that starts that the moment you leave Law School because you are all going different places.

So, be patient with yourselves when you think about your future. And apply that patience as well to your academic pursuits.

The nature of the academic endeavor here is fundamentally different from anything you've done before. Everything you'll learn here flows from a common wellspring. It is divided arbitrarily into subject areas as a means of introducing you to the information.

The material here is different from anything else you have ever studied. You might have learned math by doing lots of practice problems; you may learned history by reviewing texts again and again. Repetition brought results.

Learning the law doesn't work that way. This process will, as Professor Kingsfield put it, "Turn your brain from mush and teach you to think like a lawyer." It takes effort, to be sure, but mostly it takes time.

Think instead of your academic experience here as a round buffet table....you have to go around it multiple times before you understand the full nature of the meal...And, as you proceed through your classes, the pieces will begin to fall into place...and eventually all of this makes sense. Things will click at different times for each of you...but they will fall into place.

Put in the work, to be sure, but allow time to take its course and be patient with yourselves.

And, in 1000 days, a rising tide will carry all 198 of you into the open seas. Each of you will set sail from here on your own journey.

And you'll face the fundamental choice along the way. Professionalism or "Winning"?

It may manifest itself in dramatic ways such as when the lawyer received the confidential report sent in error as we discussed this morning. More likely, though, you'll face the fundamental choice between winning and professionalism in a million small moments....many surrounding issues of how much money you'll put in your pocket.

You'll be tempted to pursue winning above all else by thinking that you are putting your clients first. You'll be tempted to justify bad behavior because doing so will help your client win.

The system isn't about winning. It is about getting to a fair and just result based on the truth. As we discussed earlier this morning, if you zealously advocate

your client's position within the rules, and the lawyer on the other side does the same, you can trust that the system will generate a fair result. And, if that result is different than what your client may want to have seen happen...then it is likely that your client was seeking an unfair result....

So, in reality, winning is about you...and you alone. Sure, your client may get the result they desire. But, it is an impossible coincidence that every client you ever represent will have justice on their side.

No....Winning always brings the lawyer more even if the result is unjust. The winning lawyer seeks a constantly greater reputation, richer clients, larger fees and more power. Winning turns the practice of law, a professional vocation devoted to getting to the right answers...into nothing more than another business. Pursuit of winning demeans your calling.

There are other paths. Paths on which you can be a wonderful lawyer and a fine and whole person.

I came across a story within the past few weeks that makes this point. A lawyer in Miami, Javier Lopez, was receiving an award from the Bar and told of a time very early in his career that he was called to the office of a senior partner of his major law firm. The senior partner told him, "Javier, you are a B+, maybe an A-, lawyer. And, you'll never be an A+ lawyer because you place too much emphasis on your faith and family." The senior partner then regaled Javier proudly with stories of all of the family events and vacations that he had sacrificed to become an "A+" lawyer...as though each was a badge of honor that Javier would not earn.

Javier asked if his job was in jeopardy. The senior partner told him it was not. Javier's reaction: he was overjoyed! Why? Because he had just learned that he could be an A- lawyer...and have a family...and live a faith-filled life of service.

Ask yourself, "Who is the Real Winner here?" The self-proclaimed A+ lawyer living a life in which work dominates what should be the most important things in our lives?...or the A- lawyer living life as a real person?

A word of caution: you would be mistaken to take my comments here to mean that Javier doesn't work hard. He likely works as hard as anyone you know: as a lawyer, as a father and husband, a community leader and servant and as a child of God.

And it is from the breadth of those human experiences that comes a special and incredibly valuable form of wisdom which is remarkably useful in the law and which draws the trust and confidence of clients...a wisdom and level of empathy that many "A+" lawyers lack.

I know which lawyer I would rather have represent me. And I know that I would look forward to meeting Javier Lopez: he's a pretty cool cat.

And, so here is my challenge to you.

Go forth from here and make the professional choice. Turn your back on winning because **you have already won**. You were the best students in your middle schools. You won high school, the SAT, college and the LSAT. Your admission here was the last thing on your winning path.

Set your sails instead on being called to the higher levels of service upon which our profession is built.

Embrace the fact that as a lawyer you have a unique platform to help others...only one in 300 in our society can work as you will. Lawyers can uniquely help bind our society together harmoniously under the rule of law. You can help people and society in ways that no one else can.

Use your time here...and the balance of your career... to set yourself apart from those in the profession who would reduce this incredible and unique opportunity to serve into nothing more than a way to make a living.

Go...live today and every other day of your career making the right fundamental choice...and living a whole and contented life as a Different Kind of Lawyer.

It's been a pleasure to be here with you this morning. God Bless and Godspeed!