

Getting What We Need to Succeed

Practicing law in isolation is hard, especially if you are a new lawyer. I moved from Chicago to Tacoma after accepting a job offer at a civil rights firm. When I arrived, I didn't know anyone in town. In my firm, there was no time for socializing. In court, I only had opponents, not proponents. Law, lawyers, and courts were intimidating and made me feel like an outsider. I knew that being accepted as part of the legal community would take time — time that I didn't feel I had. I needed help right then.

As a young associate in a small firm, I had many questions and few answers. I didn't want to ask my boss all the questions I had, because he'd see how little I knew and keeping my job was critical for me. There seemed to be endless issues I needed help with and more arose daily. There were only so many hours in a day for researching my own questions, and I was supposed to be billing hours for work, not billing hours for learning how to do my job. I remember feeling like I needed 20 hours in a day to work so I could legitimately bill a day's work to the firm's clients. I really wanted to deliver great work, but time and knowledge were against me.

The Importance of the Legal Community

It was at this time I realized how important a legal community really was to my survival. I needed friends who were lawyers, who could answer my questions, give some direction, and keep me on the right road and away from research rabbit holes. I needed a mentor who could confirm that I was on the right track and show me how to do things the right way. I needed programs, tools, and services to build my knowledge and practice skills. But I didn't know who to reach out to or

even how to find them. Other lawyers were busy. I couldn't imagine walking up to a stranger in the courthouse and saying, "Uh, excuse me, is this memo right so far?" So instead, I quietly worked long, and at times, frustrating hours.

I gave up a social life. My priorities shifted away from friends, exercise, and things I loved to do, all in order to keep my job and ensure that I could pay my enormous student loan debt. I even contemplated bankruptcy as an option out of fear that I might not be able to financially keep up. I felt like I was blinded by smoke in a burning house and wondered if this was how it was going to be as a lawyer from then on, and if so, if I had made the right choice.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself." She may be right, but I bet she had people to learn from. I, on the other hand, did not, and thus prepared myself to live a really long life.

Fortunately, 21 years have passed since I was sworn in and 18 since I put my name on the door of my own office. I am proud of my successes and quite mindful of the lessons I have learned along the way. They resonate within me every day and form the fabric of my practice. For example, I learned that there is trial by fire and fired by trial. I did both. I don't recommend either, but by living this way I gathered lessons that are built upon a common core of interests, needs, and expectations that we all have as lawyers.

We All Want to Succeed

I believe that we all want to succeed: to meaningfully contribute to better our community, to obtain financial security, and to live happily as lawyers.

If this is true, then do you wonder how many of us succeed attaining these goals and how many feel like Sisyphus



It was at this time I realized how important a legal community really was to my survival. I needed friends who were lawyers, who could answer my questions, give some direction, and keep me on the right road . . .

trudging dutifully forward towards goals that never seem truly reachable? Statistics provide us some insight here. They show us that today young people are choosing other professions rather than law; law school admissions are declining, and lawyers, including younger lawyers, are leaving the practice while baby boomers are retiring from the practice. Could there be a common message here for our profession?

Let me ask you this: why shouldn't all competent, hardworking, professional lawyers find success and security, be able to meaningfully contribute, and find happiness as lawyers? They should, but the numbers say otherwise. If our profession was in full health, then shouldn't that be mirrored by the numbers of people wanting to be lawyers? Our takeaway? As our legal environment is changing, so must we — and as a unified bar — we can.

Ensuring Opportunities

Imagine with me. What if there were a compact that all lawyers entered into that promised that when a lawyer passed the Bar, then we as a profession would ensure their opportunity to find success, achieve security, be able to meaningfully contribute, and find happiness as a lawyer? We would take care of our own. We would be responsible for each other and we would be responsible for securing the success of our profession as a whole. Consequently, we would also be providing better-trained lawyers, better access to justice for our citizens, and a higher and more uniform level of professionalism and civility amongst members.

What if we could preserve the integrity and continued viability of our profession by simply giving ourselves more resources and support? Why couldn't we simply invest in the fundamental building blocks of success that are meaningful to each of us as lawyers and humans?

For example, we all need help creating and maintaining a lifestyle that promotes health, well-being, and work-life balance. This will lead us all to sustainable and rewarding legal practices. Our work life

What if there were a compact that all lawyers entered into that promised that when a lawyer passed the Bar, then we as a profession would ensure their opportunity to find success, achieve security, be able to meaningfully contribute, and find happiness as a lawyer?

should be our life work. So let's start there.

We also all need access to learning new skills, with new tools and technology. The shifting economy has created a new world that requires us to embrace a new legal model in order to adapt to our ever-changing legal landscape. Just look at what happened when "social" was added to "media." In a computer and Internet world full of "i" and "u" and "we," there must be an "us."

We need to remove barriers to practice and openly recruit, welcome, and nurture traditionally underrepresented groups within our profession so they can thrive and succeed. Without diversity, we lose credibility and relevance in our society.

With the rapidly changing demo-

graphics of our Bar, we all need to prepare for the growing number of retiring members and assist their transition out of practice while preserving their dignity and retaining their identity as lawyers. We cannot lose the opportunity for an accomplished and storied generation to unite with, and bring along, the next generation of lawyers.

Growing Our Legal Culture

We all need to continue to root and grow our legal culture, a culture based in community service, a culture based upon looking beyond just resolving disputes and to really healing conflicts, and a culture of ethics, civility, the rule of law and, most importantly, a culture that passes on its tradition of wisdom.

Finally, we all need to actively transition young and new lawyers into our Bar and instill this culture, our culture, within them. They are our future.

If resources like these had been available to me as a lawyer, especially as a newer lawyer, or available as I worked to grow my practice toward maturity, I am certain my path to success would have been faster, easier, less stressful, and happier. Maybe yours, too.

There is a song whose lyrics say, "God blessed the broken road that led me straight to you." I find some truth in this, not that God blessed my path, but that my path was necessarily longer. Only by losing my way could I have found this direction and arrived at this point today in my career; a place that allows me the opportunity as your Bar president to share this view, this direction, and the opportunity to grow and navigate your practice and our profession towards a better, happier future.

I hope you will join me to unite our Bar in this vision. **NWL**

WSBA President PATRICK A. PALACE practices in Tacoma. He can be reached at patrick@palacelaw.com or 253-627-3883.



Resolving Your Disputes,
The Smart Alternative

KNIGHT DISPUTE RESOLUTION
Mediation • Arbitration • Special Master

Two decades of experience litigating complex construction disputes, real estate, business and professional malpractice.

- Former Construction Manager
- WSDOT Surveyor / Construction Administrator
- Licensed Architect

KDR
KNIGHT DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Sherman Knight
(425) 576-4028
www.KnightDisputeResolution.com