

# A Little Advice

“Your word is your bond.” My dad told me that before I even got out of law school.

When I started practicing, the lawyers I worked with liked to say that if you tell someone something, you live by it. And if somebody needs extra time or a reasonable concession, you give it to them, because there will come a time when you ask for the same thing in return. Always put yourself in the other lawyer's shoes when they ask you for some consideration, because that could very well be you the next time around.

Luckily for me, I listened. I was fortunate to work among experienced lawyers who were willing to devote time and attention to help me grow professionally. I was around good people—lawyers from the Houston-Galveston area—who tried

cases and were humble.

Humility was a key trait because the lawyers I dealt with were trial lawyers, and as every good trial lawyer will tell you, “If you're trying them, you're losing them,” because you're not going to win them all. Sure, you have to be confident and sometimes aggressive, but you have to have the confidence without arrogance. I don't care how successful you are—if you're arrogant, no one wants to be around you. If you're confident and respectful, that's a recipe for a good lawyer who is also a good person.

I'm reminiscing on all of this after attending another New Lawyer Induction Ceremony and watching another group of enthusiastic men and women enter our profession. For them, this issue of the *Texas Bar Journal* features some advice from Fort Worth

attorney Tim Hoch (“Ten Rules for Young Lawyers,” page 18) along with remarks from the bar exam's high scorer, Jamie L. Yarbrough (“Let's Go Out There and Thrive,” page 16).

Probably the best advice I received as a new lawyer was to be straight-up with my adversaries. That came from my dad, Ervin Apffel, and other attorneys like Roy Brown, my late boss and mentor, and Alton Todd, who I consider one of the finest trial lawyers I've met. They taught me that if you have the utmost respect for whomever it is that you're dealing with, you are enabling yourself to negotiate and compromise with that person at a totally different level.

I remember early on in my career sitting through a deposition and watching a lawyer act rudely toward a witness. It was mean and ugly and uncalled for, and it really left a bad taste in my mouth. After the deposition was over, I was sitting with the senior partner and I remember him looking at me and saying, “You saw that lawyer operate the way he did?” Then he pointed his finger right in my face and continued, “Don't you ever act like that to a witness.” With those simple words, he taught me that I could get what I needed from a witness without being a jerk.

I'll close with a little advice of my own. I pray every day, but I don't pray for victory. I pray that no matter what the circumstances, no matter what I'm faced with, that I do the right thing. Do that, and everything else will fall into place.

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