



MY OPINION

BY BUCK FILES

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The Dream of *Esprit de Bar*

Oh, that we could have *esprit de bar*! I spent my military years in the United States Marine Corps where *esprit de corps* was a part of our DNA and where every other Marine was to be accepted as a brother or sister — for life. How wonderful it would be if every Texas lawyer had that same passion for the legal profession and for the State Bar of Texas.

Once upon a time, there was no State Bar and the legal profession was in disarray. In 1938, an article by William Burrow of the Dallas Bar entitled “The Dallas Legal Clinic” appeared in the *Texas Bar Journal* (Vol. 1, p. 40). We find this criticism of the legal profession at the beginning of his article:

[A]s a profession, our place in fact and in the public esteem is miserable.

Overcrowded, harassed by poverty, maligned by all, the profession shamelessly allows its lawyer crooks to fester in the people’s view, and feebly acquiesces in the issuance of law licenses to the fatal new excess who as bank, trust, abstract clerks, claim agents, and even as detectives, inflict their little learning upon clients in our name and to our loss.

The bar can cure its group ills only by organization and unity of action.

Seventy-three years ago this month, the State Bar of Texas was formed with 7,675 members. We now have 90,200 members and can anticipate that, by the end of 2015, our membership will exceed 100,000 members. Many people would be surprised by these numbers.

The organization and unity of action mentioned by Burrow have enabled the State Bar to bring the legal profession in Texas to where it is today, and we must be concerned about that same organization and unity of action in the future if we are going to continue to work together to strengthen our legal profession.

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Our growth in numbers has produced a predictable problem for the State Bar: the difficulty of communicating effectively with its members. It is unlikely that the lawyers of Texas will ever have *esprit de bar* if they are unaware of the challenges that the State Bar faces, what it is doing about these challenges, and the benefits of membership.

This is a frustrating problem for both the leadership and the employees of the State Bar. It seems that we keep trying, but that many are not hearing us. The State Bar has an excellent online presence through its website (texasbar.com). Some 114,000 copies of the *Texas Bar Journal* are mailed out each month; 24,000 of these to our inactive members. About four times each year, emails are sent to all of our active members. All of this activi-

ty is designed to keep the lawyers of Texas knowledgeable and, hopefully, supportive and involved.

In spite of these efforts, the question that I am asked most is this: “What do I get for my Bar dues?” In March, I spoke at a criminal law seminar in Tyler and found that less than 20 percent of the attendees were aware of the State Bar’s ethics hotline. More grievances are filed against criminal defense lawyers than any other practice group. The ethics hotline is a safety net for them. How could they not know this? That hotline number, by the way, is (800) 532-3947 and is available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

In the Marine Corps, the act of disseminating information is called *passing the word*. With the idea of trying something different, I have begun to reach out to the executive directors and officers of some of our specialty bar groups, including the Texas District and County Attorneys Association, the Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association, the Texas Trial Lawyers Association, the Texas Association of Defense Counsel, and the Metropolitan Bar Associations. At the Bar Leaders Conference in July, I shall visit about this issue with our local bar association presidents and with the chairs of our committees and sections.

When the State Bar has something that should be of importance to members, I shall send letters or emails to all of these bar leaders and ask that they pass the word to their members. I shall also request that our bar directors do the same with the lawyers in their districts.

If we are successful in this endeavor, perhaps more of our members will realize that the State Bar serves each of us and calls each of us to serve — and respond to that call. If that happens, we will be on our way to creating *esprit de bar*. ✪