



# Civility and Professionalism Matter

**A**s lawyers and paralegals, we have a unique and singular obligation to the public, our profession, and to ourselves. We are the guardians of the Constitution and the laws of this state and the United States. We took this oath to be the sentry. We are on the front lines of a constant battle to maintain these underpinnings of our democracy. It falls on us to conduct ourselves with impeccable professionalism and civility in the discharge of our work.

How we conduct ourselves in the courtroom, in the office, and in everyday life shapes the way citizens view our profession and by extension how they view the courts and the law. If we, the professionals, do not show respect for

conduct with clients, conduct with counsel, and conduct with the court. The creed should be attached to every employment contract so your client understands your responsibilities and theirs.

In 2015, Gov. Greg Abbott signed into law that a civility clause be added to the oath every lawyer takes when being admitted to the State Bar. With the addition, supported by almost every legal group in Texas, the new attorneys pledge to conduct themselves with integrity and civility in dealing with the court and all parties.

We can instinctively discharge these precepts if we are consistent in our conduct. Be prompt and responsive to courts and clients and transparent and honest in your dealings. Always tell the truth and insist on honesty from your client. A half-truth is a whole lie. Admitting you are wrong is not an admission of weakness; it affirms your honesty and truthfulness.

My father was primarily a real estate attorney, and in his career, he notarized thousands of documents and simple wills. In the middle of a will contest, he was asked if he specifically recalled the day and time a woman signed her will, which he had notarized. He did not recall. How then could he be certain that she appeared in his office, reviewed the document, and signed it in his presence? "That's easy," he said. In the 30 years he had been a notary, he had never notarized a document if he was not present and observed the affiant write his or her name.

Our commitment to the rule of law and our profession is not just from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays or when it is politically popular. Our oath to uphold the Constitution did not come with exceptions. As legal professionals our conduct is always on display. How you treat clients, clerks, staff, employees, and those around you can make or destroy your reputation, your career, and your livelihood.

I will be an unfaltering guardian. So help me God.

**"I do solemnly swear that I will support the Constitutions of the United States, and of this State; that I will honestly demean myself in the practice of law; that I will discharge my duties to my clients to the best of my ability; and, that I will conduct myself with integrity and civility in dealing and communicating with the court and all parties. So help me God."**

## —The New Lawyer's Oath

by the Texas Supreme Court and the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals on November 7, 1989. It acknowledges that lawyers, and by extension paralegals and those working in a lawyer's office, must abide by the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct. However, our behavior must go further.

We are all bound to a set of standards encouraging professionalism and protecting the public. The creed hangs in most courthouses, has been widely disseminated, and as many clients can tell you, is available on the internet. These principles of good conduct are not negotiable and are set out in four broad categories: devotion to our legal system,

the judiciary, our opposing counsel, or the rule of law, we can never expect the public to do the same. Without public respect for the courts and the law, our democracy and way of life are threatened. It is not a matter to be taken lightly.

The Texas Lawyer's Creed—A Mandate for Professionalism was promulgated

**TOM VICK**

President-elect of the State Bar of Texas