

# ETHICS RESOURCES ABOUND FOR TEXAS LAWYERS



Lawyers are entrusted to preserve and improve the administration of justice. To me, that means we must carry ourselves with integrity and maintain the highest degree of ethical and professional conduct.

The stakes in an ethical lapse are much larger than simply offending a colleague or opposing counsel—much larger than even rebuke or sanction. Ethical and moral failures carry with them potential loss of respect and reputation not only for the lawyer but also for the profession as a whole.

What's more, since 2015 all new Texas attorneys have taken a revised oath that includes a pledge to "conduct myself with integrity and civility in dealing and communicating with the court and all parties."

To this end, the State Bar of Texas has created a number of resources to assist lawyers with ethical dilemmas or concerns. You may be familiar with one or two, but probably not all. I want to take this opportunity to highlight some of these resources.

## Ethics Helpline

The Office of Chief Disciplinary Counsel operates the toll-free Ethics Helpline: (800) 532-3947. Attorneys are encouraged to leave messages that are answered by two staff ethics attorneys between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. In a Herculean effort, those two attorneys responded to more than 6,000 calls for assistance during the 2017-2018 bar year.

While the office is unable to issue written opinions, provide legal advice regarding ethical questions, or address questions concerning pending grievances, the attorneys do provide helpline callers with guidance on the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct, pointing to ethics opinions and pertinent caselaw that can help callers make informed decisions.

## Ethics Question of the Month

In September, the *Texas Bar Journal*, in partnership with the Texas Center for Legal Ethics, began publishing an informative Ethics Question of the Month for readers to ponder. The feature is designed to educate Texas lawyers about the Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct, Texas ethics opinions, and other sources of ethical guidance. See this month's question on Page 680. The answer is published with the question, and the full reasoning behind each month's answer can be found on the TCLE website, [legaethicstexas.com](http://legaethicstexas.com).

## [texasbar.com/ethics](http://texasbar.com/ethics)

Many ethics resources, including the Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct and the Texas Rules of Disciplinary Procedure, can be found online at [texasbar.com/ethics](http://texasbar.com/ethics). The page also has dozens of resources and links to commissions, committees, and nonprofits that concern themselves with promoting ethics within the practice of law.

## Free ethics articles in the TexasBarCLE Online Library

You may know that you can purchase access to more than 25,000 seminar articles through the TexasBarCLE Online Library at [texasbarcle.com](http://texasbarcle.com). You may not know that all State Bar members have free access to more than 2,100 ethics-related articles through the Online Library. Also, the Texas Young Lawyers Association's *Ten Minute Mentor* series features videos on ethics and professionalism at [tenminutementor.com](http://tenminutementor.com).

## Ethics speaker directory

To assist local bars and help promote ethics education, the State Bar of Texas Professionalism Committee created a directory of ethics professionals who are available to speak at CLE events throughout the state. The directory and other professionalism resources can be found at [texasbar.com/professionalism](http://texasbar.com/professionalism).

## Texas Lawyer's Creed

Finally, the Texas Bar Foundation and the State Bar Professionalism Committee provide free copies of the Texas Lawyer's Creed in the form of a brochure or a poster suitable for framing. The Texas Supreme Court and Texas Court of Criminal Appeals approved the creed in 1989 in an effort to eliminate abusive tactics within the practice of law and promote respect and confidence in the profession. To receive brochures or a poster, email your address to [professionalism@texasbar.com](mailto:professionalism@texasbar.com) and bar staff will happily fill your request.

I found many of these ethics resources tremendously helpful in my practice as a Galveston County trial lawyer, and I hope you do as well.

Your State Bar is committed to fostering high standards of ethical conduct and providing useful services to our members. If you have ideas for additional resources, please let me know.

Sincerely,

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*Have a question for Trey? Email it to [trey.apffel@texasbar.com](mailto:trey.apffel@texasbar.com) and he may answer it in a future column.*