

# THE TEXAS LAWYER'S CREED 30 YEARS LATER

A renewed focus on the conduct, behavior,  
and credibility of the legal profession.

BY SUZANNE MANN DUVALL

*"I am committed to the Creed for no other reason than it is right."*  
—Preface, Texas Lawyer's Creed

Article I of the Texas Lawyer's Creed states, "A lawyer owes to the administration of justice personal dignity, integrity, and independence. A lawyer should always adhere to the highest principles of professionalism."

Thirty years ago, the highest courts in Texas responded to concerns expressed by the Dallas and Houston bar associations about the overly aggressive actions of a few "Rambo-like" members of the profession. One court warned of the threat to the administration of justice by "pernicious" and "unnecessary contentious and sharp practices between lawyers." As a result, following the appointment of a committee to study the issue and the subsequent recommendations of that committee, in November 1989, the Texas Supreme Court and the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals stepped in before the problem became too widespread and issued the Texas Lawyer's Creed by court order—an order that is still in effect today.

The courts sent out thousands of copies of the creed to lawyers and judges throughout Texas to ensure it was impressed upon the consciousness of all members of the profession. However, over time, the presence of the creed as a "tool" of legal practice faded into the background. Six or seven years ago, I was speaking to a seminar of about 300 Dallas lawyers and I asked for a show of hands of all who had heard of the Texas Lawyer's Creed. Only about three or four raised their hands.

I was shocked and puzzled. It had been more than 20 years since the issuance of the Texas Lawyer's Creed in a court order handed down by the Texas Supreme Court and the Court of Criminal Appeals. Did the tiny number of lawyers in the room who had ever heard of the creed mean that we had done such a great job of accomplishing civility and professionalism in the practice of law that the creed had achieved its goal and served its purpose? Was the creed no longer necessary? Or had the observance of civility and professionalism become less important and the contentious practices the creed condemned

once again become common—even accepted—practice?

In her tenure as chair of the State Bar of Texas Professionalism Committee, Kenda Culpepper embraced the creed and, working with then-State Bar President Buck Files, initiated a renewed focus on it. Under their leadership, the Supreme Court and Court of Criminal Appeals reaffirmed the creed. That action by the courts, coupled with the declaration by 2017-2018 State Bar of Texas President Tom Vick that "Civility and Professionalism Matter," has resulted in a renewed attention on the existence and importance of the creed (which, after all, is a *court order*) and upon the behavior of attorneys in their practice.

The Professionalism Committee has undertaken providing "Days of Civility" at the state level and supporting local bar associations in holding local "Days of Civility" programs all over Texas. Additionally, as was done when the creed was first ordered, thousands of copies of the creed have been provided to attorneys, judges, courts, and bar associations. Copies remain available through the Professionalism Committee upon request by emailing [professionalism@texasbar.com](mailto:professionalism@texasbar.com).

These activities and efforts are, once again, focusing members of the profession on the importance of their conduct and behavior in their interaction with colleagues, the courts, and clients. Their behavior and conduct truly does matter in the reputation, public image, and credibility of the legal profession.

On behalf of the Professionalism Committee, I urge all lawyers to be a part of creating and maintaining a positive image—and reality—of the legal profession by conducting themselves as models of civility and professionalism. **TBJ**



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*is an attorney-mediator in Dallas with over 800 hours of training in mediation, arbitration, and negotiation. She has mediated over 3,500 cases to resolution and serves as a faculty member, lecturer, and trainer for numerous dispute resolution organizations in Texas and nationwide. She is currently chair of the State Bar of Texas Professionalism Committee.*