



My Chat With James Baker, III: **PROFESSIONALISM AND THE ART OF MAKING THE DEAL**



I HAD THE INCREDIBLE PRIVILEGE TO INTERVIEW FORMER U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE JAMES A. BAKER, III in mid-April at the Baker Institute for Public Policy at Rice University. That conversation is coming soon to a screen near you. This month, the State Bar of Texas is releasing the video as a CLE webcast, available free to members. See the story by Eric Quitugua in this issue of the *Texas Bar Journal* for details.

An active member of the State Bar of Texas since 1957, Secretary Baker's remarkable career is unlike that of any other Texas lawyer. He had a long career in Washington, serving under three presidents. In addition to his time as secretary of state for George H.W. Bush, he also was White House chief of staff for both Bush 41 and Ronald Reagan. Earlier, he had been secretary of the treasury and under secretary of commerce. Today, he is a senior partner in Baker Botts in Houston and honorary chair of the Baker Institute.

Secretary Baker is widely acknowledged as a master negotiator. Our discussion in April centered on "Professionalism and the Art of Making the Deal." That's also the topic of the CLE webcast.

I will admit, going into the interview was nerve-wracking. It was kind of like being in trial and having the ultimate expert witness on the stand. But Secretary Baker was so disarming. He put me at ease, and we had a good discussion about many things, including negotiation tactics.

According to the secretary, the most important thing in any negotiation is to know who you're dealing with. You need to think of the negotiation in terms of where they're coming from in order to get where you want to go. He talked about that in terms of being a good lawyer, a good negotiator, and a good leader.

I felt his comments about everything we talked about were as important in life as they were in a law practice.

After the event, I was exhausted, but interviewing Secretary Baker was one of the highlights of my legal career. It was just an incredible experience.

I encourage you to watch the CLE. I think you will find it as inspiring as I did to hear the historical perspective of this lawyer leader. His contributions are great examples of how many lawyers make a significant impact on society. Obviously, he did it on a big stage. But we, as lawyers, all have opportunities to make a difference.

I want to thank Bill Kroger, a State Bar director from Houston and partner in Baker Botts—the event was his brainchild. Thanks also to John Williams, policy assistant to the secretary and fellow at the Baker Institute, for helping to facilitate the event.

Sincerely,

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