



LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

State Bar of Texas President Cindy Tisdale on taking chances and saying yes.

INTERVIEW BY PATRICIA BUSA McCONNICO

Cindy Tisdale was the first in her family to graduate from college—and law school. She learned early on that she had to follow her own path to be the best she could be. Her parents were very supportive, encouraging, and loving, so when they decided to divorce when she was a young girl, it had a big impact on her. Tisdale believes that is what steered her toward the law, specifically family law. “I love being an amicus attorney,” Tisdale said. “Because I always relate to the children by telling them my story.”

Tisdale was born in Fort Worth but grew up in Early, a small town in West Texas just northeast of Brownwood. As an only child, she received support from both her parents and stepparents. By the time she graduated from high school, Tisdale already knew she wanted to attend Baylor University and go to law school. Even though there were some bumps and curves in the road along the way, she always got back on the road, accomplishing her dream and graduating from Baylor as an undergraduate and from law school. “Moving from a small town where I knew almost everyone to a town and university where I knew no one, I learned I could handle just about any situation,” Tisdale said. In law school, she enjoyed the advocacy classes best—being able to take all the knowledge she learned in the classroom and funneling it into an oral argument. Tisdale loved learning to think on her feet.

She started her legal career working as an assistant district attorney for the McLennan County District Attorney’s Office, handling its civil docket, which included Child Protective Services, or CPS, cases. Tisdale transitioned to a law firm and then became a founding member of a small firm in Granbury, located about 38 miles southwest of Fort Worth. Having her own practice, she did everything, from payroll and billing to cleaning and making sure there were enough drinks in the refrigerator. “What they do not teach you in law school is how to run a business,” Tisdale said. “I made a lot of mistakes, but I think I learned from them.” She now practices family law with Goranson Bain Ausley in Fort Worth and Granbury.

On June 23, Tisdale was sworn in as president of the State Bar of Texas at the bar’s Annual Meeting in Austin. Tisdale recently talked with the *Texas Bar Journal* about her career, role models, and plans as president of the State Bar.



ABOVE: From left, 2023-2024 State Bar of Texas President Cindy Tisdale with her children and fur babies. From right, Cindy with her daughter and son. PHOTOS COURTESY OF CINDY TISDALE

WHO IS YOUR LEGAL ROLE MODEL OR MENTOR AND WHAT IMPRESSES YOU MOST ABOUT HIM OR HER?

There are so many! Tom Vick. Gary Nickelson. Wendy Burgower. Harriet Miers. Judge Bill Logue. I could probably fill this page with all of the attorneys who have shaped me into who I am and how I practice. Although they are in different practice areas and were in my life at different times, they all have the same qualities and characteristics. They are hard workers. They are constant students of the law. Their ethics are unimpeachable. They were zealous advocates for their clients as lawyers. They are truly nice people. They balance work and family. I hope to be them when I grow up.



WHAT LESSON OR EXPERIENCE HAS MOST IMPACTED THE WAY YOU PRACTICE?

When I was a young lawyer, a senior attorney told me I would be fired if I ever went back on my word to another attorney or fudged the truth to another attorney. Rule 11 agreements were for those you didn’t trust. If I said something to another attorney, I better stick with it. My reputation among my peers is paramount and to never let a client get between me and doing what is right.

YOU CAMPAIGNED ON THREE MAIN PLATFORMS. TELL US MORE ABOUT THEM AND WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU.

1) *To maintain our status as an independent and self-governing bar.* This is vital to our profession. We want to keep the right to self-govern and self-regulate.

2) *To have transparency and open lines of communication with our members.* I enjoy talking to lawyers throughout the state. I welcome anyone to reach out to me to discuss any issue about the bar they like or dislike. I may not always agree, but I will always listen!

3) *To be fiscally responsible with members’ dues.* Our dues are \$235 a year, and they have not been raised in 32 years! The bar gives so much back to its members for this small amount of dues. In formulating the budget for the next year’s budget, I kept two things in mind. Can we afford it? Does it help in fulfilling our mission? The answers to both had to be “yes.”

WHAT OTHER AREAS WILL YOU BE FOCUSING ON THIS YEAR AS STATE BAR PRESIDENT?

What can make our lives as lawyers easier? I am continuously asking this question. Everything from as simple as making it easier to file vacation letters, to our overall well-being, to civility



ABOVE: Cindy Tisdale in front of one of her favorite murals. PHOTO COURTESY OF CINDY TISDALE

in the profession is constantly on my mind.

WHAT HAVE YOU FOUND MOST CHALLENGING ABOUT BEING A LAWYER? MOST REWARDING?

I practice family law, and there are definitely some challenging days. It is tough sometimes not to take my client's problems as my own. It is tough to leave it at the office some days. When I have a client going through horrendous situations such as family violence or abuse of the child, it is tough to turn off my brain at night. Of course, on the flip side, it is the most rewarding when I can help those who are most in need of help. Knowing I helped a family to move on and past one of the worst things that has happened to them puts all the other days into perspective.

WHAT IS THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE YOU HAVE EVER RECEIVED?

Your reputation is everything. Never put it in jeopardy.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE LEGAL PROFESSION WILL LOOK LIKE 50 YEARS FROM NOW?

I think artificial intelligence, or AI, will change the face of the

profession, and I cannot even imagine what that will look like. I am putting together a work group to look at the impact of AI on our profession, including the ethical implications.

NAME YOUR THREE ABSOLUTE FAVORITE THINGS TO DO ON THE WEEKEND.

See my family. See my friends. Play golf.

DESCRIBE YOURSELF IN FOUR WORDS.

Compassionate. Driven. Dependable. Empathetic.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD?

Do not say "no" out of fear. Fear of failing publicly, fear of looking silly, and fear of being rejected should never come into your decision-making process. I have always heard the saying that you will regret the things you did not do much more than the things you did. Take the chance and say "yes." I do not know where I would be if I had said "no" because of fear, but I can promise you that you would not be reading this interview with me as the president of the State Bar of Texas. **TBJ**