



**“If a mistake is made, or something is missed along the way, you have a responsibility to admit your errors, not blame others.”**

# Young Lawyers

BY RYAN J. WORKS, Young Lawyers Chair

## FIVE PRACTICAL TIPS TO LIVE BY AS A YOUNG LAWYER

### **Own up to your mistakes early and always.**

In this profession, we all make mistakes. The problem is, not everyone takes responsibility for those mistakes. Nothing bothers me more than to see a lawyer tell a judge that their paralegal or secretary mis-calendared an event or failed to file a pleading on time. As the lawyer, such things are ultimately your responsibility. If a mistake is made, or something is missed along the way, you have a responsibility to admit your errors, not blame others. You will garner more respect by being open and honest about mistakes, rather than throwing someone else under the bus. Concealing a mistake can lead to even more trouble. Covering up a mistake will not make it go away; in fact, that mistake will likely grow into a much larger problem. Thus, you should always address errors at the outset, do everything you can to mitigate the problem and move on. Almost all errors in life are manageable, easily fixed and thereafter soon forgotten by most. However, if you hide your mistake and someone else discovers it (which is certain to occur), you will have undoubtedly lost the trust of that person and will always be remembered for the attempted cover-up.

### **Return telephone calls and e-mails within 24 hours or less.**

Clients are our customers, and good business means good customer service. You should always return your clients' communications within a day or less. If you are busy, a simple e-mail to the client to acknowledge that they called, with a promise to follow up as soon as you are free, takes only a few

seconds to compose and is greatly appreciated. It lets your client know you value them and their issues, and that those issues will not be ignored. In turn, that client will not follow up with a partner and will not mention that their communication went unanswered. Such a call can be devastating to your advancement because senior lawyers will not vest you with additional responsibility or future client management.

### **Be courteous to others.**

I can't count the times I have heard of lawyers mistreating their secretaries, paralegals, couriers or others in general. We are all human and everyone deserves the same amount of respect. Your staff is often your greatest asset in this profession and you should treat them as such. As a young lawyer, you make your reputation very early in life and it is therefore vital that you mind your manners. It takes just one blow-up to brand you as someone who treats others poorly. This can follow you for the rest of your life even if you later amend your behavior. Remember the Golden Rule and you will fare well in this profession.

### **Create a work-life balance and stick to it.**

The time it takes to be a lawyer is daunting. We have hours to bill, clients to serve, partners to please, administrative chores to complete, practices to market and networks to build. Spending your entire life lawyering will eventually and inevitably lead to burn-out. You must find time for yourself, your family, friends, exercise, hobbies, travel or any other pleasurable activity that takes you out of the office. You will be a happier and more productive lawyer and

you will last much longer than the attorney that cannot let go of work. This becomes more and more difficult as you advance in your career, so decide what you want to make a priority early on and do your best to stick with that work-life balance over the years.

### **Be ethical when billing your clients.**

To be ethical is a no-brainer for most of us, but requires constant reinforcement. Professional responsibility is drilled into us during law school; we have model and local rules of professional conduct that we live by; each year we are required to attain continuing legal education credits specifically addressing moral conduct. To me, being ethical means being truthful – to myself first, and then everyone else. This is especially important when it comes to billing my clients. I first have to be truthful with myself about the time it took to complete the task. I next have to ask if my client should have to pay for it. Do not succumb to the temptation of manufacturing billable hours merely to achieve a milestone. While the pressure to meet billables can be overwhelming, your reputation as someone that carries a “heavy pencil” will be insurmountable. Indeed, padding your hours is the same as stealing, which will eventually cost you clients, your job and maybe your license. ■

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