



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

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THREE DECADES OF CHANGE

During the past 40 years, I've seen a lot of changes in the legal community – and some of those changes have not been for the better. In fact, young lawyers have a more difficult time getting started than I did.

I started practicing law as a prosecutor on March 1, 1977, in the Washoe County District Attorney's Office. Back then, the Reno legal community was still relatively small, and I knew just about every lawyer in town, if not personally, then certainly by name. In my experience, you could resolve many issues with a phone call and a handshake. It was definitely a different time and place, and sadly, those days are gone.

My son, Matthew Digesti, has been practicing law for the past 10 years, and I thought I'd speak with him about his experiences as a young attorney and compare them to my own.

The first thing Matthew recalls about my reminiscing on the early days of my career is the absence of the social aspect that used to prevail within Reno's legal community. Private and public lawyers would gather socially, getting to know one another in settings that were not adversarial. If everyone just simply took the time to get to know one another in a social and friendly setting, it just might cut down on the incivility that has taken over the legal profession.

And that brings me to a point I have always stressed to Matthew – and other young attorneys – about developing and maintaining a good reputation. It is easier to maintain a good reputation than try to repair a bad one.

I don't think it is a secret in the legal community that certain lawyers have a certain reputation. You often find yourself dealing with an individual or individuals you do not know, and in today's legal environment, you must take the extra step and protective measure of following everything up with written confirmation. I suppose that is a good way of doing things, however I am saddened to realize that an attorney's word and handshake does not mean the same thing today that it did 40 years ago. Times have definitely changed.

From his experiences as a young attorney, Matthew explained that the cost of law school has really impacted where new lawyers start their careers, as many start out looking for high-paying jobs in order to pay back overwhelming student loans, and quite often have the additional burden of having to support a family. As such, there are some very talented young lawyers who do not seek public legal service, because

the salaries are too low. There are even fewer young attorneys who attempt to open a solo practice, because the ramp-up to profitability is too long and uncertain.

"This has a major effect on legal services for the poor and middle class," Matthew said. "Attorneys are expensive. Public service attorneys and solo practitioners are the ones that a majority of individuals can afford. As the number of these attorneys decrease, so will the number of individuals who will have access to justice. This is a real problem, which is only going to get worse."

The advent and growth of technology has certainly been one of the biggest changes I've seen during my career, and I don't necessarily believe that is a good thing. You can never really get away from technology. If you are an attorney and carry a cell phone, clients have the ability to contact you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and believe me, they do. You are never away from it. There are arguments to be made on both sides of the technology debate, but it has definitely changed the landscape of the legal profession.

Matthew has been practicing for a decade, and has observed firsthand how technology has changed the practice of law in such a short time.

"I have seen how technology has transformed the evidence available at trial," he said. "It used to be that parties and witnesses could generally go about their daily lives and not create the risk that most choices made could later become evidence in a court proceeding. With the Internet and social media, everything posted online about a person is available in subsequent legal proceedings. The advent of technology has changed the way lawyers investigate cases, think about evidence and present cases at trial."

Congratulations to all my peers who have made it to 40 years in service, and good luck to those young attorneys just starting out. You've made an excellent career choice – just be sure to protect your reputation by remaining civil, and by all means be sure to return all telephone messages in a timely manner. An informed and happy client will make your life much easier. **NL**