

What is Your Legacy?

By: Sally Field, Esq.

“Be nice to the court clerks” was some wise advice I received when I first started practicing law, “You never know when you will need a favor.” This advice is so true and I can think of more than one occasion when that advice helped me get a hearing date or something filed when it was a close call. I had treated them well and it when it mattered most, they did the same for me. Primarily however, the reason given to me for being civil to the court clerks was self-interest.

What we leave behind us in each case and encounter as a lawyer will be our legacy. Did we leave others better off than we found them? We may not be able to prevail in every matter, but we can positively influence how they feel about the legal system and lawyers. Civility matters and not just when it is in our best interest. A true test of our character is how we treat those who are not in a position to help us. How do we treat people that we encounter in our law practice who cannot help us or are on the opposing side?

Treating others with civility and respect is the right thing to do, but our culture seems to be telling us something different. In pop culture, sports and certainly in politics, incivility towards those who disagree with us or are on the opposing side is too often the norm. Grace in victory and defeat does not seem to be in fashion. So when you encounter someone for whom civility, kindness and respect for others is an integral and unwavering part of their character, they stand out. That was true of Lane Young*.

I had the great privilege to know and work with Lane Young as a client and I mourn his loss. He was a person and lawyer of integrity and kindness. He was a gentleman to everyone he encountered. After his sudden passing, the articles written about him described him as “the consummate gentleman”, “kind, caring,” “adored by clients,”¹ “one of the truest, most loyal defenders of lawyers” and “absolute straight shooter.”² Some of those descriptions came from those who

were his opposition in high profile, hotly contested litigation. Those kind of descriptions about people are rare and for lawyers, even rarer. Even rarer are those kinds of descriptions about someone who was at the top of his profession as a nationally known trial attorney. To be recognized nationally as a trial attorney and be known just as much for his kindness and civility as his legal achievements, is unrivalled. Wouldn't we all feel proud to have that as our legacy?

Sadly, too many lawyers say they don't enjoy practicing law. Lane did. And he was very proud to be a lawyer. He was also one of the most effective advocates defending lawyers sued for malpractice. He saw it as a calling. He cared about his lawyer clients and they often became friends when the case was over. But more than his advocacy and winning record for clients, they remember his character, his civility, his kindness and his respect for others. His example of decency and kindness influenced me throughout the twenty something years I knew him. I hope his example is the one from which I continue to learn and hope can become a bigger part of my legacy. What will be your legacy?

**Lane Young was a nationally recognized legal malpractice and toxic tort defense attorney with Hawkins, Parnell, Thaxton & Young LLP in Atlanta, GA. He tried more than 100 trials to verdict across the country in more than 20 states.*

¹ Lane Young Recalled as a Legal “Renaissance Man” (www.law.com/dailyreportonline/2018/06/14/lane-young-recalled-as-legal-renaissance-man/)

² The Practice is a Profession (www.dentons.com/en/insights/newsletters/2018/july/11/practice-tips-for-lawyers/daily-report---the-practice-is-a-profession)



Sally is an attorney of 30 years and President of Attorney Protective, as well as a Bobby Flay wannabe.