

Steps to Renew Pride

It's happened. That life-altering event. That moment's realization that things will not be the same again for quite some time: My 23-month-old daughter (nicknamed "Sassy") learned how to scale the crib and won't stay in it.

If you don't have kids, this seems benign. It's not. This developmental achievement means the end of daily naps, which means the end of "I've got two hours to get something done" time. It means the end of a relatively stress-free bedtime routine, knowing both kids are down for the night—and staying there. It means the tradition to which my husband and I have grown accustomed is over.

In thinking about this all too-real familial change, I have wondered if it is any different from the declining pride I sometimes see lawyers exhibiting about our legal profession. Has that once revered image of lawyers somehow gotten away from us? I don't mean the public's image of lawyers (which is a different topic altogether). I mean, have we tumbled out of our own good graces? Has our own pride in "being a lawyer" inched its way over the railing and escaped us, much like my daughter from her crib?

These types of questions come to mind when I hear lawyers dissuading young people from becoming lawyers, when I hear lawyers confess they are reluctant to tell otherwise-unknowing people that they are attorneys, and when lawyers themselves tell "lawyer jokes" that demean the profession and its members. These questions also surface when my husband, who is not a lawyer, but who sometimes attends lawyer functions, shares dialogue he often encounters at such events:

Attorney: Are you a lawyer too,
 Mark?
 Mark: No.

Attorney: (patting him on the back)
 Well, good for you.

My husband is not at all sure how to respond to this exchange, nor am I sure what one is to take from it other than the attorney's belief that it is a good thing not to be a lawyer. Would someone similarly congratulate my husband upon learning he is not a doctor or a teacher? It seems unlikely. So why do lawyers de-value their own profession in this way?

In all honesty, I don't think most of us have abandoned our pride in the legal profession. I think most of us are satisfied and indeed take pride in the work that we do to advance justice, protect the rights of the accused, and represent and counsel clients. So perhaps the better question to reflect upon is: How can we better convey our pride and respect for this profession?


Changing the way we talk about the profession is certainly one way, but communicating our respect and pride can take many forms. I offer five ideas for how each of us can renew and reaffirm our own sense of pride and commitment to this still-noble profession:

1. Rent and watch your all-time favorite "lawyer movie" - the one that first impressed upon you what it meant to be a lawyer, the one that made you think, "That's what I want to be someday."
2. Read, sign, and return the "Pride in the Profession Pledge" that you will receive from the HCBA this month.
3. Take 90 minutes to honor our recently deceased colleagues who devoted their careers to the legal profession by attending the Bar Memorial on Wednesday, April 30;

4. Participate in just one Law Day event during May.
5. Renew your oath to the profession at the HCBA's Annual Meeting luncheon on May 22, 2008.

How will any of these things make a difference? You'll have to do at least one of them to tell me it didn't, but I feel pretty confident that accomplishment of any of the above will successfully remind us what value our profession has and what an honor it is to be part of it.

My husband has solved the escaping Sassy situation for the time being; she now has her own specially-constructed, high-wall confinement nest. Peace and order is now restored!

Wouldn't it be worthwhile to also contain the respect and pride this profession has historically enjoyed? It too is doable—if we don't throw our hands in the air, but choose instead to respond to the situation. I hope you'll join me in the latter. 



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