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Traditions and Professionalism

There are many long-standing traditions observed by our courts, our state and local bars, and our attorneys in Louisiana. There are Opening of Court ceremonies throughout the state. While these ceremonies are held at different times in the fall or the first of each year, the tradition dates back to a time before air-conditioning when most of our courts closed during the heat of the summer months. It is an opportunity for the judges and lawyers in a community to get together each year in a formal, but collegial, atmosphere. The court openings are frequently preceded by a Red Mass.

This, too, is a long-standing tradition in Louisiana with the first Red Mass having been celebrated in New Orleans at the St. Louis Cathedral on Oct. 5, 1953. The Mass is offered to request guidance from the Holy Spirit for the legal profession and the pursuit of justice. Further, the Louisiana Supreme Court and local courts customarily have ceremonies to memorialize, eulogize and show respect for those attorneys who have passed on in the last year. Many local courts combine these events with recognition of the sitting and retiring judges, as well as welcoming new attorneys to the practice. These traditions are some of the clearest examples of professionalism.

Over the last year, I have had the distinct privilege and honor to attend and participate in gatherings of this nature in Alexandria, Lafayette, Lake Charles, Monroe, New Orleans, Ruston, Shreveport and, only a few weeks ago, in Baton Rouge. At these events, I have had the opportunity of visiting with the new lawyers, the families of the deceased attorneys, local bar leaders, and the sitting and retired judges. Whenever and wherever held, the one theme that reverberates among those participating and attending such events is a pride in the legal profession. These ceremonies can almost be described as a celebration of the law and the profession. Unfortunately, for many lawyers, attendance at these functions may be the only time during a year that such feelings are the focal point.

It is a simple principle but one that is worth repeating: Being ethical is what you *must* do to practice law, but being professional is what you *should* do in

the practice of law. Professionalism is essential to the proper practice of law. Professionalism is a concept that seems clear to me, yet the clarity of what is professional is often questioned. Abraham Lincoln captured the spirit of professionalism in writing: "When I do good, I feel good; when I do bad, I feel bad, and that is my religion."

More than 20 years ago, the Louisiana State Bar Association's Professionalism and Quality of Life Committee developed a Code of Professionalism for its members. The Louisiana Supreme Court approved that Code on Jan. 10, 1992. The Code begins with the old but never truer adage, "My word is my bond," and goes on to delineate 11 specific types of conduct that should be engaged in or should be avoided. If you have not read the Code in a while, it is worthy of revisiting.

To me, honesty, candor and integrity are not just words to a lawyer. They are traits exhibited by all good lawyers each and every day. While the American system of justice is an adversary system, good lawyers know how to be worthy adversaries while still being courteous and respectful to everyone involved. I and my predecessors have made it a point to advise every new lawyer who we have welcomed into the profession that professionalism is contagious. The more you do it, the more others admire you for it, and the more those around you want to be like you. Some may say this is corny but I believe it, and I have observed these principles in the conduct of some very good lawyers for more than 35 years.

At the traditional gatherings of our courts and local bars, without exception,



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@LSBA_President Larry Shea with Lafayette Bar Association officers at Court Opening ceremony.



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the new lawyers are encouraged to be professional in their practices. The retired judges are most often recognized for the respectful and courteous manner in which they have treated attorneys and litigants who have appeared before them. Rarely is there a focus on an important opinion or decision unless the rendering of the decision was under circumstances exhibiting great courage — a sign of professionalism among judges. With very few exceptions, the eulogies of deceased members of the Bar that I have heard (and I have heard a lot of them) do not focus on the economic successes of the deceased lawyer or his or her “winning percentage.” Instead, far more time is

spent recounting the professional example that the deceased attorneys have set for those who have been around them, and the friendship, advice and encouragement they have provided.

From the beginning to the end, from the commencement of a legal career to its conclusion, the most important aspect of a lawyer’s career can be summed up in professionalism. In and of itself, *professionalism is the greatest of all of our traditions.*



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CODE OF PROFESSIONALISM

- ▶ My word is my bond. I will never intentionally mislead the court or other counsel. I will not knowingly make statements of fact or law that are untrue.
- ▶ I will clearly identify for other counsel changes I have made in documents submitted to me.
- ▶ I will conduct myself with dignity, civility, courtesy and a sense of fair play.
- ▶ I will not abuse or misuse the law, its procedures or the participants in the judicial process.
- ▶ I will consult with other counsel whenever scheduling procedures are required and will be cooperative in scheduling discovery, hearings, the testimony of witnesses and in the handling of the entire course of any legal matter.
- ▶ I will not file or oppose pleadings, conduct discovery or utilize any course of conduct for the purpose of undue delay or harassment of any other counsel or party. I will allow counsel fair opportunity to respond and will grant reasonable requests for extensions of time.
- ▶ I will not engage in personal attacks on other counsel or the court. I will support my profession’s efforts to enforce its disciplinary rules and will not make unfounded allegations of unethical conduct about other counsel.
- ▶ I will not use the threat of sanctions as a litigation tactic.
- ▶ I will cooperate with counsel and the court to reduce the cost of litigation and will readily stipulate to all matters not in dispute.
- ▶ I will be punctual in my communication with clients, other counsel and the court, and in honoring scheduled appearances.

Following approval by the Louisiana State Bar Association House of Delegates and the Board of Governors at the Midyear Meeting, and approval by the Supreme Court of Louisiana on Jan. 10, 1992, the Code of Professionalism was adopted for the membership. The Code originated from the Professionalism and Quality of Life Committee.