

Civility—The Golden Rule



Frank O. Brown, Jr., 2001–2002 Senior Lawyers Conference Chair

The Senior Lawyers Conference's direct interest in civility springs from two sources: our individual responsibilities as legal professionals, and our Senior Lawyers Conference Bylaws, approved by Virginia State Bar Council, in which two of our charges are ". . . to uphold the honor of the profession of law . . . [and] to encourage cordial discourse and interaction among members of the Virginia State Bar . . ." The emphasis in this chair's column and in the winter 2002 issue of the *Senior Lawyer Newsletter* is on civility.

Although "civility" is a fundamental component of professionalism, in lay terms, civility is generally defined as "politeness" or "courtesy." Politeness is accepted as "conduct marked by consideration for others," and courtesy is accepted as "behavior characterized by graciousness and consideration toward others." If we continued our review of definitions, we would be drawn to the inevitable conclusion that civility is really the Golden Rule, which most of us learned as children, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." This is an ethic of reciprocity, which, in one form or another, has existed for centuries in many cultures throughout the world; yet, a look at writings throughout history reveals a pattern of concern in which writers and commentators have decried uncivil conduct, or a decline in civility.

Unfortunately, in today's business and legal practice, the Golden Rule has sometimes been corrupted to "Do unto others before they have a chance to do it to you." We trust that those who adhere to this latter point of view are in the minority in our profession, and that the majority of practicing lawyers are civil and professional. We are hopeful that, through the combined efforts of law schools, the bar, individual lawyers, and the judiciary, civility will be maintained where it exists and restored where it is lacking. We believe that civility is not only a necessary characteristic of a professional lawyer, but that it is an essential quality in a civilized society.

As lawyers, we have a duty to demonstrate civility in our dealings with our clients, other attorneys, judges and others. We commend to you the materials on civility in the Winter 2002 issue of our newsletter, which may be viewed on the Web at www.vsb.org/slc. In addition to the chair's message, the newsletter contains a wonderful article, entitled "Our Charge Is This—

Civility," by G. Marshall Mundy of Roanoke, and C. Glasgow Butts of South Hill; reminiscences about two distinguished lawyers who personified professionalism and civility—Armistead Boothe and Charles L. Kaufman—by A. Hugo Blankingship and Leroy T. Canoles, Jr., respectively; newsletter editor Francis N. Crenshaw's thoughtful editorial comment, in which he capsulizes civility as "that indispensable lubricant of a profession." Please visit our Web site and make use of the resources there, including the links to many other sites of interest to us and our clients.

Our Web site contains the SLC Nominating Committee's report of the nominees for the officer posts and board of governors, to be voted on at the SLC annual meeting at the VSB annual meeting on June 14, 2002, at Virginia Beach.

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The SLC continues to work on the issue of lawyers protecting their clients' interests by planning for the lawyer's disability or death. On our Web site, you will find materials to assist with this planning, including a durable limited power of attorney, which can be used to designate another attorney to act in the event of your inability to act during your lifetime.

We look forward to seeing you on June 14, 2002 at our CLE workshop (which we are co-sponsoring with the Trusts and Estates Section and the General Practice Section).

If you wish to e-mail any comments or suggestions to me, please send them to lawinorder@aol.com. Thank you. ☺