

Character is what you do when no one is looking.

—Excerpted from the remarks of the Honorable Gerald Bruce Lee, Virginia State Bar Professionalism Course Video



Kathleen M. Uston, 2003–2004 Young Lawyers Conference President

Many of you who are reading this have most likely attended one of the Virginia State Bar professionalism courses. If you did so recently, you saw the updated video in which professionalism and civility in the practice of law were discussed by some of the most well-respected and preeminent jurists and attorneys in the commonwealth.

For those of you just starting out in the practice of law who may think that those laudatory words are nice and good to ponder but have no practical application in the real world, where it is the victory is what matters, the billable hour that controls and, thus, the ends justify any means, think again.

Most bar members view integrity, honesty and fair dealing as their guiding philosophy. There are those attorneys whose word is all that you need, and there are others with whom you'd better put it in writing. As the Honorable Johanna L. Fitzpatrick observed in her remarks in the professionalism video, people whom you face across the table today will be there again tomorrow—and they will remember.

Judge Fitzpatrick also noted that your reputation precedes you into the courtroom. As Judge Fitzpatrick observed, there are those attorneys who can cite the principles for which a case stands, and the judge is confident that this is exactly what the case teaches.

I have been fortunate this year to be given the opportunity to have this space in which to communicate with the YLC membership. I once noted the wise advice bestowed upon the YLC Board last fall by Justice Henry Whiting, who told us of his firm and abiding belief that volunteering with the YLC makes us better people and, thus, better lawyers. In the professionalism video, Tracy Giles, an attorney practicing in Roanoke and a past YLC president, commented that our law degrees require of us a higher responsibility. As Tracy said, one lawyer can help someone out of a jam, but 100 lawyer volunteers can change the lives of an entire group of people forever.

For each of us who chooses to begin our retirement years with the closing of our law practices, victories in the courtroom will not be the only measure of success. The real test will be how those victories were derived.

If we can close that chapter of our lives feeling, as Judge Robert R. Mehrige, Jr., said, the pure joy of the practice of law, and knowing, as Judge Fitzpatrick expressed, that we cannot imagine ever having done anything else, we will have succeeded.

If, upon investigating all that the YLC has to offer both our profession and the public, you find that there is an area that interests you, get in touch with me. If, in your community, you have identified a need that is not being met, drop me a line, or contact any of the YLC Board members. We are always looking for new projects and new volunteers to join our ranks.

The true joy of the practice of law is felt, as we all well know, when you walk away from a case or a cause knowing that you helped someone in need. The YLC is here to help us all achieve that joy. ☺

VSB Professionalism Course

May 6, 2004 — Chesapeake

July 29, 2004 — McLean

August 26, 2004 — Roanoke

for additional dates and a registration form:
www.vsb.org/membership/professionalism.pdf