

# The Perception Issue

by Daniel L. Gray, 2007–08 Young Lawyers Conference President



In my relatively brief life as a lawyer I've noticed we spend a lot of time wringing our hands over how the public views us. The general sentiment seems to be that we're held in low esteem and that we should be doing something about it. Every few years, someone launches a campaign to return us to our rightful place among the professions held in high regard—whatever those might be. These campaigns typically extol some worthy acts, but do such campaigns change hearts and minds? I expect not.

I've been involved in bar work for about ten years now, and it's given me some insight into this perception issue. I've noticed that the lawyers who don't spend a lot of time hand-wringing are generally the ones working to bring honor to the profession—although that isn't their primary goal. Their actions remind me of the old saw about marriage: stop looking so desperate and true love will find you.

I wish the desperate among us could see what goes on within the bar. The hand-wringing would stop.

One of my pleasures as president of the Young Lawyers Conference is the invitation to sit in on Virginia State Bar Council and Executive Committee meetings. The dedication that your colleagues bring to their endeavors—and

the level of discourse on the truly important issues we face—are inspiring. I'll cite as the most recent example the fine work of Carter Glass IV and his Judicial Nominations Committee, which vetted fifteen candidates for recent Supreme Court of Virginia and Virginia Court of Appeals vacancies. Sitting in on Mr. Glass's presentation to the committee, you'd be struck by the time required of his committee, the painstaking efforts to provide every candidate a fair review, and all participants' appreciation of their roles in the judicial selection process.

If you'd be impressed by the executive committee, you'd be astonished by the Young Lawyers Conference. My immediate predecessor, Maya M. Eckstein, said at our annual meeting that the work of the conference carries on "in spite of its president." She's right about that. The president is the signal man waving the freight train by.

The young lawyers who serve as members of our board and committees and as our circuit representatives have boundless energy, dedication, and imagination. Sarah L. Petcher, Hugo R. Valverde, and their Immigrant Outreach Committee have been so successful with programs designed to assist this much-maligned populace that Ms. Petcher and Mr. Valverde were invited to address a statewide conference of

juvenile and domestic relations and general district court judges.

Christopher E. Gatewood and his successor, Meghan M. Cloud, crank out the YLC's publication, *Docket Call*, which has won first place in the American Bar Association periodicals category every year in recent memory.

Jennifer L. McClellan, our president-elect (and a delegate in the Virginia General Assembly), dreams up diversity programs such as the Oliver Hill/Samuel Tucker Law Institute as easily as she dashes off her shopping list.

You'd be so impressed by your colleagues in the conference, who work so hard just because they love to do what they do. Not a hand-wringer among them.

To my Young Lawyers Conference member readers, I'd urge you not to rend your clothes and wail over the decline of our profession's esteem. We'll keep you too busy to worry about any of that. To my older readers, I say take heart. There are still a good many lawyers out there working to make you proud.