

Now Is the Time to Practice Civility and Courage

By Geoffrey Wells

These days there is a lot of discussion about civility in the practice of law. The State Bar Rules of Professional Conduct have even added special rules to promote this behavior.

California Rules of Court, Rule 9.7 was adopted and renumbered as 9.7 which states:

In addition to the language required by Business and Professional Code Section 6067, the oath to be taken by every person on admission to practice law is to conclude with the following: “As an officer of the Court, I will strive to conduct myself at all times with dignity, courtesy, and integrity.”

Some people have expressed fear that being civil is a sign of weakness. I think this attitude is wrong. I think being civil and practicing with integrity shows strength and confidence in your abilities and your case.

As I have gotten older, I have realized being civil is a great way to make and keep friends and friendships. It is a way to keep connections with other people even if they are opposing counsel or competitors in your area of the law.

A Harvard Study of Adult Development which followed people for over 80 years, found that “people who were the happiest,



stayed healthiest as they grew old, and who lived the longest were people who had the warmest connections with other people.”

Civility starts in your office. How do you treat your staff? Do you blame people for mistakes or have their back when things go south? Do you care about the people you work with? Do you know their families? Do you know their hopes and dreams? If not, you should. Take the time to know the people that have your back every day. Make sure your staff and your associates are invested in your clients the same way you are as the attorney.

As trial lawyers, we often talk about how to behave and practice when you are in trial and in or around the courtroom. How about approaching your life the same way! People are watching all of us as lawyers. Are you obnoxious at your kids’ sporting events? Are you rude and arrogant in restaurants or bars? Do you treat people well or are you an entitled jerk? To me, the issue of civility transcends the courtroom and the court houses. At a time when our professionalism and the people in it are under attack now is the time to show civility

in all aspects of our lives. Now is the time to come together and police ourselves and those in our profession who are not doing things the right way!

To all of us, as we practice law, in depositions or courtrooms, if you see something that is not right, please stand up and say something. There are times when attorneys are not being treated properly by the bench or the other counsel. I think it is on all of us who believe in honor and integrity to stand up and say something even if it is opposing counsel.

In these times of division in our state and country, I think there is another word we need to add beyond civility and that word is **COURAGE**. **COURAGE** to stand up and say something. **COURAGE** to march in the streets. **COURAGE** to speak out for people who don’t have a voice. **COURAGE** to confront people who want to demonize immigrants. It’s our oath to the Constitution to stand up for the Rule of Law in our cities, counties, and states. It will take all of us and now is the moment. Do not let this opportunity pass you by to show honor, integrity, civility and courage. ■



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