

PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

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Keeping the Human Connection in Law



The law is grounded in rules but shaped by relationships. Legal practice—one of humanity's oldest institutions—is fundamentally a social business.

Many of us in the profession, myself included, gravitated here because of the human connections we can forge with the people we represent and our colleagues in the law. The legal system is a deeply human system, made up of people who make mistakes but, for the most part, strive to fulfill their obligation to uphold the law. It is flawed, like any human institution, but it is the system we depend on to deliver justice.

The law also attracts people with a talent for persuasion and a penchant for conversation. Business gets done in pivotal, face-to-face moments—with your adversary on the courthouse steps, across the table during a high-stakes deposition or through a brief handshake at a networking reception. You never know which interaction will add another tool to your legal toolkit or when a new connection will open a door that propels your career forward.

And, with any luck, some of those adversaries you once fought tooth and nail in court become your closest friends and confidants. They become colleagues you can turn to for a sympathetic ear or candid advice from a different perspective. I don't know many professions like that. The social and collegial nature of the law is part of what makes this profession special. Success in the law is not just what you know, it is also who you know. You can be the best tax lawyer in the state, but if nobody knows this, your practice suffers.

Unfortunately, much of that changed with COVID-19.

When the wheels of justice all but ground to a halt, attorneys went from arguing in open court to arguing before a computer screen in their home offices. Opportunities for spontaneous human connection dried up and were replaced by Zoom meetings, emails and phone calls. This is a far cry from when I started practicing. You first drafted a response in long-hand or dictated a response into a Dictaphone. You then reviewed the final product. This deliberation and reflection encouraged a more respectful level of communication.

Thankfully, the pandemic is behind us, but we never fully returned to the professional norms that defined the practice of law before COVID. Virtual proceedings and remote meetings are now fixtures of the profession. The amount of face-to-face time we have with one another is more limited.

I worry about what we lose as a result.

For experienced practitioners, the change can make the profession feel more isolated. But I am particularly concerned about younger attorneys, who are beginning their careers without many of the everyday interactions that helped previous generations learn the profession and build relationships. It is harder to climb the ladder when you have fewer chances to meet the people who might help you find the next rung. I learned more in court rooms watching other proceedings than I did in any law school class. The conversations I had with other lawyers in the courthouse hallways taught me lessons no bar examination preparation course could provide. Those experiences were invaluable.

There are practical consequences, too. It can be difficult to fully gauge a witness's demeanor and credibility through a virtual deposition. It is harder to establish rapport with an adversary or the court when interactions are confined to brief appearances on a screen. And professional relationships are simply more difficult to build when remote meetings replace the conversations that once happened in hallways, conference rooms and courthouses.

It's a brave new world.

I'm under no misconception that the profession will ever return completely to the way things were. Nor should it. Technology has made aspects of legal practice faster and more efficient, while remote work has created welcome flexibility in our professional and personal lives. But efficiency should not come at the expense of connection.

That's where I believe the New Jersey State Bar Association has an important role to play. Through networking events, receptions, section and committee gatherings, golf outings, educational programs and countless other opportunities to meet face to face, the NJSBA can help fill some of the social void left by the pandemic.

Fall is one of the busiest times of the year at the Association. In recent weeks I have had a front-row seat to the many ways

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there is usually no reason to be nervous. As I continued with the YLD, I was given the opportunity to lead the Wills for Heroes Committee. The responsibility seemed daunting for a third-year associate, but observing how my predecessors managed the events prepared me to step into the role. I successfully led several Wills for Heroes events before passing the reins to another young lawyer, who has taken them even further. That experience gave me confidence and valuable social capital by allowing me to meet people throughout the YLD, the broader Bar, and the first responder community. More importantly, it taught me that clear

communication and a positive attitude go a long way. By observing and learning from those around me, I was prepared to do a good job when my turn came.

I am now entering my second year as Editor-In-Chief of *Dictum*. Although the role is demanding, it gives me the opportunity to help others express themselves through writing. I encourage young attorneys to write about topics that interest them, and senior attorneys to use writing to expand their reach and grow their practices.

The NJSBA has been an invaluable support network, transforming a room full of strangers into a community of

friends and colleagues with whom I have grown and learned. Joining a community where you know no one can be one of the best steps you take, but the key is to keep entering the room until you know at least five people. As you build relationships and learn about others, opportunities emerge that can shape your professional life. I encourage young attorneys who want to expand their networks and practices to get involved as soon as possible. Once involved, do not rush the process; it is perfectly fine to begin as a fly on the wall. Showing up matters most. Your community—and the opportunities that come with it—will follow. ■

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the NJSBA brings our legal community together.

I was proud to attend the New Jersey State Bar Foundation's biggest night of the year, where U.S. District Court Judge Esther Salas and Gerald H. Baker received the 2026 Medal of Honor for their service to New Jersey's legal community. They have demonstrated extraordinary integrity, professionalism and legal skill throughout their careers. And both, like myself, are products of the Hudson County community, with its rich diversity and storied history. I had the privilege of thanking them for their outstanding contributions to the profession and to the advancement and improvement of New Jersey's justice system. There are few occasions when so many leaders of New Jersey's legal community gather in one room to celebrate the ideals and individuals that strengthen our profession. The NJSBA and Foundation provide an invaluable forum for doing just that.

The NJSBA's First Annual Golf Outing at Fiddler's Elbow Country Club in Bedminster was another resounding success.

More than 140 members, guests and sponsors attended, with golfers of all skill levels hitting the links for a four-player scramble and a day of networking and camaraderie. The event also featured a barbecue lunch and a post-golf cocktail and dinner reception. To everyone who joined us—and those who would like to next time—we look forward to seeing you next year. Few activities can match the bond creation that a round of golf creates. If you have ideas for events that bring people together—hikes, picnics, retreats, bowling—we welcome your suggestions.

To celebrate National Hispanic Heritage Month, I also had the privilege of sitting down for a fireside chat with HBA-NJ President Cristal Lambert at an event presented by the NJSBA Minorities in the Profession Section. We had an intimate and engaging discussion about leadership, representation and our personal and professional journeys in the law, followed by an opportunity to connect with colleagues over Latin-inspired cuisine and beverages. Gatherings like these are among the most meaningful ways we can celebrate the contributions of Hispanic

attorneys to our Association and the greater New Jersey legal community.

And there is much more ahead.

If you are looking to get out and reconnect with colleagues this fall, there will be no shortage of opportunities. We have judicial receptions for attorneys who practice in Tax Court and complex business litigation, wine events for women in the profession and young lawyers, along with the vast array of section and committee meetings and NJI-CLE programs that make this such an active time of year at the Association.

I encourage you to take advantage of them. Attend a program. Stop by a reception. Introduce yourself to someone you have only seen on a screen. Reconnect with the colleague you haven't spoken to in a while. Because for all the ways technology will continue to transform the practice of law, there is still no substitute for being in the room.

I hope you'll take advantage of all the NJSBA has to offer this fall. I look forward to seeing you at a seminar, reception or mixer, or at the Annual Mid-Year Meeting in Lisbon this October. ■