

REMARKS
JUSTICE PETER T. ZARELLA
BAR ADMISSION CEREMONY
June 10, 2013

Thank you, Chief Justice Rogers.

It is my pleasure and honor to welcome you and your family members and friends on this most important day. On behalf of the Connecticut Supreme Court, I offer you congratulations and a heartfelt welcome to your new profession. Today represents the culmination of many years of hard work, dedication and perseverance. However for the people of the state of Connecticut, the Court, and all the members of the bar your admission today represents a new opportunity. So we commend you on your accomplishments.

It is a new opportunity for the Court and the bar, because in the long run we will be looking to you and your colleagues to carry forward the best traditions of the legal profession. I am referring to the traditions of pro bono service, the representation of those with unpopular causes, the filling of various roles in state and local government whether it is on a state board or commission or on your local zoning board, as well as the many other roles that attorneys play in our society. This tradition of voluntary service by attorneys is ancient and honorable. For the people of Connecticut, you represent the hope that the rule of law and the fairness of our system, which has developed over the past two hundred years, will continue into the future and will be improved upon through your efforts.

In order to realize these opportunities, I offer you the following. Today is the true beginning of your legal education. You have completed your formal legal education of course – which is quite an accomplishment on its own – but the process of being an attorney is just that – a process that requires constant effort to stay up to date on the law.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "I don't think much of the man who is not wiser today than he was yesterday." This is especially true when it comes to attorneys. The law is an ever-changing profession, and the best lawyers are those who approach each day with the desire to gain a better understanding of the law and the world around them.

In order to be relevant and useful to those you represent, you must educate yourself day in and day out. This is not an easy task, but it is essential. Fortunately, there are many valuable resources for learning. Probably the most important of these resources is your colleagues and the bar associations in this state which offer both support and educational opportunities. The Connecticut Bar Association's mentoring program is particularly helpful because it pairs young lawyers with seasoned members of the bar who are happy to discuss their stories and experiences with you. I recommend that you take advantage of this valuable opportunity.

As you know very well after three years of law school, we lawyers can be a somewhat zealous and contentious bunch. We are taught from day one that an attorney's duty to represent a client's interest vigorously is one of the sacrosanct tenets of the practice of law, and no one on

this dais will tell you anything to the contrary.

Unfortunately, in our desire to be zealous advocates, we sometimes lose sight of the fact that antagonism is not the same thing as effective advocacy. In recent times, it seems that many lawyers have difficulty balancing their obligation to provide vigorous representation with their responsibility as an arm of the court to proceed in a civil and professional manner. This imbalance has resulted in a decline in civility and professionalism that directly affects all lawyers.

It affects us because our profession is no longer esteemed in the same way it was in the early days of this country when over half of the participants in the 1787 Constitutional Convention were lawyers. It also affects us because it changes the manner in which we define effective debate. That is, we start to focus on how an argument is delivered, rather than on the substance of the argument itself.

It is critical to remember that the most effective advocacy does not stem from posturing and tone, but from reasoning and a solid understanding of the substance of the issue at stake. Our system of justice relies on informed debate as a productive vehicle to explore all sides of an issue. At the heart of our profession is the belief that analysis and argument concerning all aspects of a question, coupled with an impartial and conscientious bench, leads to justice and fairness. We do our profession a disservice when we rely on bluster and contentiousness to make our point. To the contrary, a strong argument rests on hard work and substance. The best argument grows from a complete understanding of, and respect for, an opponent's position, rather than a summary dismissal of that position.

We look to you, our newest attorneys, to strive to restore an atmosphere of courtesy and mutual respect to all of our legal proceedings. I am certain that my colleagues on this court would agree with me that one way to build an outstanding reputation in the legal field is through professional behavior and respect for all with whom you associate during the course of your workday, whether it be opposing or fellow counsel, court staff, judges or clients. By conducting yourself in a courteous and professional manner, not only will you establish your reputation in the legal community, but you will also help to foster an atmosphere of civility and serve as a role model for your peers.

By approaching the law in this manner, I can assure you that you will be well-positioned and prepared to best represent the clients who come to you for help. Their future, and sometimes their lives, will be in your hands. Never lose sight of the fact that your advocacy and negotiating skills can mean the difference between someone losing or retaining their home; between a contentious and prolonged divorce proceeding or an amicable and thoughtful resolution. You may represent the couple on the verge of losing the family business. You might represent a defendant accused of murder. You might be appointed to be the voice of children torn apart by divorce. Whether you are representing a client on the most serious felony or on a standard real estate closing, you must always represent that client with zeal and to the best of your ability – you must also be patient and supportive.

And, in your desire to present an effective and winning argument, never lose sight of the

human element of the law. If we are not careful, we lawyers can overlook the fact that the law is not just an abstract concept or topic for debate – it is a very real force that has significant impact on the individuals involved. While zealousness has a role in advocacy, strive as well to cultivate the more difficult art of civility for you and your client will both benefit.

If you understand what is at stake for your client, and if you proceed with hard work and respect for others, you are sure to succeed in this profession or any other. I hope that your efforts in this regard will one day cause your colleagues to point to you as one who has built a career on sound principles of professionalism and integrity.

So, on this day of great opportunity for all of us, and on behalf of my colleagues on the Supreme Court, I welcome you to the legal profession and wish you much success in your career in the practice of law. Congratulations.