

A Profile

IN PROFESSIONALISM

In one of its many aspects, professionalism is about courage. Courage to be true to oneself; courage to ask why not; courage to say no; courage to say yes; courage to master the difficult and attempt the impossible; courage to accept and learn from mistakes; courage to respect the judiciary; courage to be honest and straight-forward.

For a brief time I served as Judge of the 270th Civil District Court, and with this opportunity came a particular case where courage and professionalism intersected. Counsel requested that we strike an individual from the venire because he was deaf. They articulated – as best they could – tactful reasoning as to why this should be done, but when simplified it was nothing more than tired excuses of difficulty and inefficiency, and my personal favorite, that it had never been done before. But tolerance and respect would be prioritized in my courtroom: this individual had faced enough hardship in his life, and performing his civic duty was not going to be another one. He was seated on the jury. Yes, proceedings were somewhat delayed, but they were just. When we act with the courage necessary to truly be professional, there is justice. At the end of the trial, a

very emotional juror thanked the attorneys and the court for allowing him to feel “normal,” and participate in the civil justice system. I will never forget this lesson in professionalism. It took courage on his part to sit as a member of the jury, serving as a constant reminder that we live in a world where we must be tolerant and respectful of people with all or limited abilities. His respect for the judicial system is an example to us all.



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I find it most relevant today to emphasize that professionalism is lost without respect for the judiciary. Our judiciary is under public attack by those who do not believe in its equality as a branch of government. This is wrong, and we, as professionals, must have the courage to publicly denounce those who not only threaten the independence of our judges, but who also attempt to weaken our Constitution. Our system encourages appeal to reason, and this is jeopardized

when we treat as somehow appropriate, vituperative personal attacks on those with whom we strongly (but merely) disagree.

Let us each maintain our own, individual profile in courage, strengthened by our practice of a profession that has the significant potential to right the world's wrongs. 