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Journey on Being a Successful Lawyer

Nitza Milagros Escalera
Fordham University School of Law

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Journey on Being a Successful Lawyer

Cover Page Footnote

Assistant Dean, Fordham University School of Law.

JOURNEY ON BEING A SUCCESSFUL LAWYER

*Nitza Milagros Escalera**

When I speak of success what I am referring to is making a difference—reaching out and serving even while in school. It means putting yourself in the place of others, empathizing with others, seeking to bridge differences.

For the past seven years, I have listened to Dean Feerick speak these words to each new class of lawyers-in-training that we have welcomed to the Law School. These two sentences illustrate that John D. Feerick does not measure professional success by factors such as one's salary, the number of cases one wins, the number of deals one closes, the number of boards on which one sits, the number of articles one publishes, or the number of degrees after one's name.

John D. Feerick, the embodiment of this definition of a successful lawyer, is committed to being of service to others in an ethical, compassionate, and caring manner. He is committed to building and fostering relationships. Dean Feerick does this by being both teacher and student, by being a seeker of truth and justice, by valuing the dignity of each person, and by being a person of empathy. Dean Feerick encourages others. He is willing to take responsibility for his mistakes. And very importantly, he values friendship, personal integrity, hard work and harmony in both his professional and personal life.

The value Dean Feerick places on relationships is evident in his words and in his actions. He has established these relationships by showing interest in the individual's life experiences, identifying where appropriate with these experiences and then fostering these relationships with countless words and acts of appreciation, congratulation, sympathy, and encouragement.

The Dean has visited members of the Law School community when they've been hospitalized and he has attended services performed in the memory of our loved ones. I know, because on a number of occasions, either Diana Sanabria, the former Director of Student Affairs, or I accompanied the Dean to be with a student in a hospital emergency room, or to attend the funeral services of a student's family member.

* Assistant Dean, Fordham University School of Law.

The Dean has been at our celebratory events as well. Student leaders know they can count on the Dean attending every dinner hosted by their student group during the Spring semester. He'll attend the local competitions of the Moot Court Board, he'll be one of, if not the highest bidder at the annual Auction, and he'll laugh up a storm at the Follies. I particularly enjoy sitting near the Dean at the Follies to share great laughs at the ingenious ways students find to depict him and those of us on the senior staff. And don't forget to look for the Dean on the dance floor at the Barrister's Ball. You might find him dancing with Mrs. Feerick, a member of the graduating class, or me. Yes, we two deans still know how to boogie. If you look carefully, you may see us boogieing on the dance floor again this year!

On a more personal level, I'll never forget arriving home after the May 1995 Diploma Ceremony physically and emotionally drained. Working to ensure that the first diploma ceremony for which I had responsibility went well, I had slept very little that week. When I entered the foyer of my building, I found a bouquet of flowers, from the Dean, with a simple note saying thank you for a job well done. I'll always remember that Dean Feerick took the time from his busy schedule to make introductory remarks at the 1997 banquet of the Women's Committee of the Puerto Rican Bar Association at which Yvette Bravo-Weber, the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs at N.Y.U. Law School; Gloria Rivera, then Assistant Dean for Admissions at St. John's Law School; and I were honored.

And, the Dean doesn't limit these notes or acts of kindness and relationship-building to those of us who are associated with the Law School. Our families have also been recipients of his friendship, of his reaching out to form and foster relationships. My mother, for example, received well wishes from the Dean when she had a mastectomy. He remembered her on Mother's Day. And when my mother's older sister died, he had a Mass offered in her memory. Since my mother's mastectomy she has been the recipient of gifts of fruit baskets from the Dean and both have exchanged yearly Christmas greetings. Some of the funniest moments I have shared with my mother include watching her taste, for the first time, the exotic fruits that have arrived in these baskets.

Dean Feerick has chosen to follow a path of service whose focus it is "to mend relationships and ease social stress."¹ However, this path is not always an easy one to follow. During my seven and a half years working with Dean Feerick, I believe one of the greatest challenges he has confronted on this path has been the sanctioning of students who violated the Law School's Academic Code. However, even in these very difficult and often painful encounters, the Dean has never ceased

1. Steven Keeva, *Transforming Practices: Finding Joy and Satisfaction in the Legal Life* 131 (1999).

to show students respect, empathy, and compassion. Dean Feerick, as you continue on your journey of service, I pray that “the Lord bless you and keep you; [that he] make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; [that he] turn his face toward you and give you peace.”² Amen.

2. *Numbers* 6:24 to :26.

Notes & Observations