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Cover Page Footnote

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JOHN D. FEERICK: SETTING THE COURSE

*Robert J. Reilly**

I recall a late summer day in 1982. The School year was about to begin, and John Feerick, new at the role of Dean, was participating in an open forum for second and third year students. The event was sponsored by the Career Planning Center and its focus was the on-campus interview program that was about to begin.

Probably a hundred or more students were gathered in the Pope Auditorium and it was to be, for most of them, their first encounter with this new Dean. Job interviews are always stressful, and the week-long run of interviews, possibly the first professional interviews of their young lives, took on an importance that was substantial. The new dean was known to have been the Chairman of the hiring committee at the firm of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, already regarded as the hottest and most increasingly successful firm in the nation, and his views would matter.

After a series of run-of-the-mill questions about interview techniques, firm styles, evaluation criteria, and the like, a young woman raised her hand to ask a question. She mentioned her background and undergraduate training, and then told of a recent interview experience. In the course of the interview a question had arisen about her prior job experience. From what I could gather her parents owned a candy store, or similar small business, and she had worked in it. Apparently the interviewer made some remarks that belittled the experience. Her question to the Dean, "How should I handle that situation?"

There was quiet in the room. All of the students were anxious and eager to obtain employment at one of these Wall-Street type firms. They had worked hard in school, had shouldered heavy educational loans and debts, and the prestige and security of these few jobs meant a lot to them and their families. There were all sorts of possible answers about explaining the variety and responsibility of the prior job that could have satisfied the question and closed the issue.

John Feerick handled it this way. He said, in effect, "You learned something very important in that interview: you learned that you are too good to work at that firm. All of your training, experience, energy

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and ability deserve an atmosphere where you will be valued and appreciated.”

You could hear a pin drop. Out of the dozens of possible responses he reached the one that was correct morally, ethically and emotionally. It was the type of response that came to be the norm in the next twenty years, in situations with students, faculty, staff and alumni. The respect for the individual was made the highest value, while working for the good of the entire community was the highest goal.

That attitude brought together many diverse peoples who ultimately have a common pride and ownership in the School. It is reflected in the dozens of student groups who volunteer their services; it is the motivating factor for the three prominent programs known as the Stein Scholars, the Moore Advocates, and the Crowley Fellows, all of which were begun at his encouragement; and it has attracted alumni support in ways and amounts never previously imagined.

Fordham Law School is, today, a special place. Among lawyers in all parts of our nation, and now around the world, one of the proudest boasts is “ I went to Fordham Law School. John Feerick is my Dean.”