

What Legends Are Made Of

I often find it comical how movies incorrectly portray the legal system. In a little over a week after a client initially meets with his or her attorney, they are sitting in a courtroom ready for trial. I watched this same scenario play out in 2014's *The Judge*. Despite this impressively unrealistic trial timeline, I enjoyed the film.

Robert Downey Jr.'s character, Hank, is a successful defense attorney estranged from his family who finds himself back in his small hometown defending his father, a longtime judge, played by Robert Duvall. My favorite scene in the movie occurs on one of the *few* days that Hank has to prepare his case after learning that the judge has cancer. Hank is helping the judge, who has just had a chemotherapy treatment, to bed and in an attempt to

change the subject, he asks, "Who is the best lawyer you know?" Hank specifies that the judge has to choose a lawyer who he actually knows. The judge thinks about it and names a local attorney who he had the privilege to observe and work with when he was a young lawyer.

I found myself thinking about this scene long after the movie was over. Who is the best lawyer *I* know? I grew up in a rural area, and my family did not run in the same circles as attorneys. I knew who the local attorneys were only by what I read in the newspaper. I knew what attorneys did by what I saw on television. It was not until I started practicing law that I learned what it really meant to be an attorney. It is impossible to capture that feeling and responsibility on film or in a photograph.

For me, just like the judge, the best lawyer I know is a local attorney I had the privilege of working with when I first started practicing law. His name might not be recognized by everyone in town, but his character, intelligence, and professionalism made him legendary in my book. I never grew tired of hearing him reminisce about his mentor and old cases.

I have a feeling that even high-profile lawyers feel the same way about an attorney they encountered when they were just beginning their careers. Who were the local attorneys who left an impression on them, the senior partners who verified their career choices, the attorneys who made them great? My curiosity got the better of me.

So TYLA went across this great state and asked some legendary Texas attorneys what—and who—helped make them so successful. How they got to where they are, and what they viewed as the life-altering moments in their careers. Their responses are fascinating.

These legal legends don't look back and regret the mistakes, the losses, or the missed opportunities. Instead, they learned from those moments, made some adjustments, and moved forward, stronger from having had the experience. Now, in TYLA's new book, *If I Knew Then...Life Lessons from Legendary Texas Lawyers*, they are passing on some of their wisdom gained from their successes and their failures.

As young lawyers, we will have some days where we feel like we got it all right—that we obtained the best possible outcome for our clients. Other days the feeling is just the opposite. Throughout our representation, we might have to provide these clients with a more realistic case timeline than what the movies have taught them; but if you ask them, we are the best attorneys they have ever known.

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