

Practice as if Santa Were Watching

'Tis the season of good tidings and Christmas cheer, a time when we are called to put aside petty differences, love our fellow man, and maintain a selfless spirit. Working with lawyers for a living, however, can prove difficult. I'm currently dealing with an attorney who makes me want to pull out my gentlemanly white glove, drop a brick in it, and slap it across his face. I am sure many of you have someone similar in mind. How can we possibly be kind to these people even for a month?

Despite stereotypes about our profession, attorneys get along remarkably well. Consider that every day thousands of attorneys across the state are involved in complex legal matters. They manage issues that impact people's jobs, fortunes, families, and freedom. These attorneys not only deal with the stress of the case but also the stress of working against each other. Opposing counsel is often a well-trained and intelligent peer vying to win not just the case

but also future clients. There is so much at stake, yet one rarely hears of a physical or even offensive verbal confrontation between attorneys in a courtroom.

That is because most attorneys remember that we are called to a higher standard. We are expected to be examples to our clients and to demonstrate how to maintain decorum in both success and failure. We must be models of patience and calmness. When dealing with opposing counsel, we understand that professionalism requires that we not allow a personal grudge or vendetta to hinder our ability to do what is in our *client's* best interest. As Abraham Lincoln once said, "Discourage litigation. Persuade your neighbors to compromise whenever you can. ... As a peacemaker the lawyer has a superior opportunity of being a good man. There will still be business enough."

For these reasons, I suggest that we *can* be kind to all people, even that jerk attorney. I am imploring you to remember this month and year-round to maintain a Christmas spirit when engaging with your clients and opposing counsel. Teach them respect for the law and courts through your actions as much as your words. Treat other attorneys like the fellow professional problem solvers and peacemakers that they are, or at least should be. Above all, respect yourself by not allowing unprofessional attorneys to take you down to their level. Answer rudeness with respect. Swallow your anger, make it a point to get through the day with a smile on your face, and break out a glass of eggnog if needed.

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