

Civility costs nothing, buys everything

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While technology has certainly increased the pace and improved the practice of law, electronic communications have become the No. 1 hotspot for lawyer misbehavior and incivility. This must change. As a mentor taught me, “If you wrestle with a pig, you’ll both get muddy, but the pig will enjoy it.” Dexterity in communicating in interactions with clients, witnesses and the public are skills that lawyers historically developed early in their careers and fine-tuned over the course of their lives.

For decades, lawyers would work out problems with opposing counsel in the hallways or conference rooms of our courthouses. Lawyers would take advantage of talking to the judge rather than filing motions. The shift to remote practice has prevented lawyers from doing this. The heavy reliance on technology has resulted in hiding behind emails and text messages, and in many instances sending uncivil communications. There is now a whole generation of lawyers who attended law school online

and are now practicing from home.

We must be mindful of the importance of developing and mastering soft skills: not only people and social skills, but also character and personality traits. From empathy and integrity to flexibility and communications, these skills are critical to success in the legal profession.

As experienced lawyers, we are obligated to mentor and train the next generation of lawyers in the soft skills of civility and lawyering: how to effectively conduct a phone call, hold a face-to-face meeting, have a cup of coffee, or engage in an informal conference with the court.

The new technologies that have advanced the practice of law are here to stay, but that does not mean we can accept incivility in practice. We must do what we can to keep what was good and most useful in traditional practices and apply them in modern practice. We must commit to training young lawyers and improve civility in the practice of law to ensure the betterment of our profession.