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LAWYER

“The Complete Lawyer” BY JEFFREY M. WILLIAMS, *Special to the Legal*

Many times, when people are in need of legal help or searching for a lawyer, they consider only whether or not that attorney concentrates his or her work in the specific area of the law that they need, be it divorce, real estate, estate planning, etc. As such, some attorneys feel as if the fact that they advertise that they perform that kind of work, that is sufficient to demonstrate their ability and credentials. However, I believe there is much, much more to it than that.

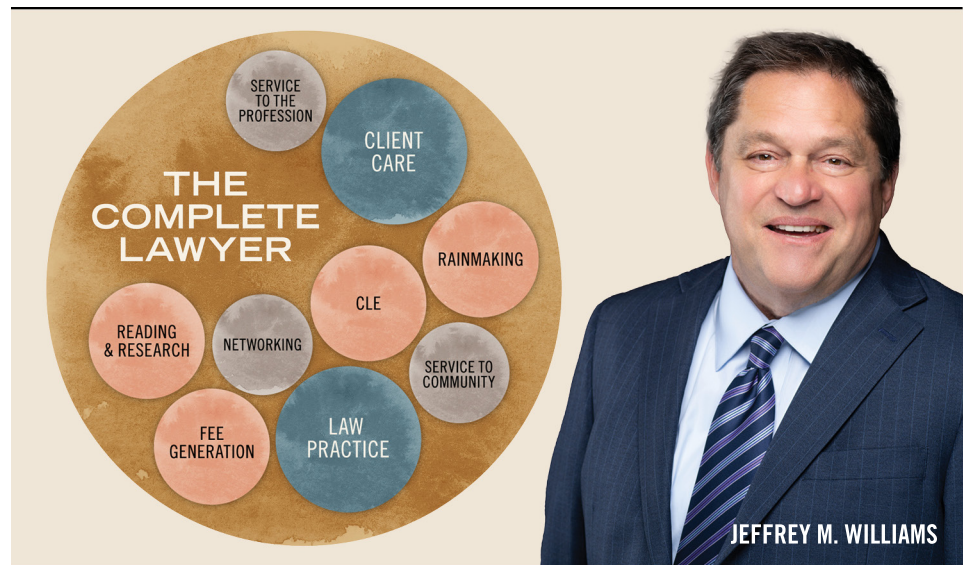
It has been my experience, and what I have observed in the careers of many of my successful colleagues over the years, that to be an effective advocate for our clients, there are multiple components of a sound legal practice that extend well beyond specialization in any given area of practice. These components involve learning, personal growth, giving, sharing, and being mindful of the firm's overall health. Together, these individual components make up what I consider to be the truly “complete” lawyer.

In no particular order, they are as follows:

CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION (CLE) In a rapidly changing legal landscape, continuing legal education keeps our knowledge current. Attending these CLE programs helps sharpen our skill sets as we learn from others. Delivering these programs allows us the opportunity to share valuable experiences and lessons we have learned. When it comes to knowledge (and so many other things in life), there is great value in both giving and receiving. Parenthetically, the teaching aspect of law (whether it is done internally and informally at a law firm or externally in a professional continuing legal education setting) is one of my favorite parts of practice.

NETWORKING Connecting with your colleagues can be very empowering and enlightening, as building professional relationships can open doors to new opportunities and help generate referrals back to you and the firm. Importantly, it also allows us to create a strong network of support where we can tap into others' experiences and resources as needed. With your network, you can exchange ideas, evaluate best practices, and propel each other toward mutual success.

R&R (READING AND RESEARCH) As we well know, legislation and legal precedents change all the time; that is how it should work in a democratic judicial system. A commitment to reading and research in addition to attending CLE programs allows us to stay on top of the latest developments in the law. This, in turn, will help us make informed recommendations—to our clients, colleagues and, sometimes, those who actually create and influence that legislation. I was



very fortunate to be one of the individuals selected to address substantial changes to the commonwealth of Pennsylvania's custody laws in 2010. It was very empowering to me to work alongside some really great “Family Law minds” during this effort, and it was also very gratifying to know that I had a hand in effecting improvements to an important part of the law in Pennsylvania.

VOLUNTEERISM AND SERVICE Put simply and directly: you cannot be a member of a community, be it your neighborhood or any professional association, without playing an active role in its health and growth. That is why volunteering and service are so very important. Your contributions will come back to you tenfold in an active and thriving society. Get on the school board. Help the bar association or chamber of commerce. Offer your time and talents to a local nonprofit. You get the idea.

RAINMAKING Anyone can work more to increase their billable hours. A rainmaker, however, is someone who actively works to bring new business into the entire firm. I challenge you to venture to be someone who increases not only your share of the business at the firm, but also brings in new clients and new work for all of the other attorneys. If you concentrate on the good of all, then all will prosper as a result. As the saying goes, “A rising tide lifts all boats.”

FEE GENERATION Similarly, every attorney in a firm must work to actively understand and contribute to the fiscal health of the business—its people,

its infrastructure, and its growth. Being mindful of the nuances of your firm, and not just focusing on a paycheck, is absolutely crucial. Adopting such a mindset will ensure that the firm is there to help clients for years to come. Many younger lawyers forget that all firm attorneys must be cognizant of clients' bills and the collection of the same.

CLIENT CARE Our clients are the reason that we are in practice. Make sure that you always, always put their needs first. Be communicative and compassionate and look at every case from their perspective. Everyone wants to win, of course. But, while winning is often a goal, sometimes we must instead look for the best possible resolution for a client. Remember, this means taking the costs and the delay of litigation into account when providing advice and strategic recommendations.

LEARN TO PRACTICE LAW Become better at what you do by experiencing every aspect of it. Pleadings, discovery, motions, trial, and appeals. What you are not yet able to do yourself, attempt to observe others doing. Ask questions. Discuss strategy. Never stop learning, experiencing, and growing. You will truly be the better for it.

The practice of law can be incredibly gratifying. It also comes with a genuine responsibility. I have always been committed to all of the above so that I can be a better and more responsible advocate for my clients and proud of what I am able to offer them. •