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## A Call for Renewed Civility

From my days in the Marine Corps, I can still remember that cartoon. On the right side of the page was a tall mound of characters—in no particular uniforms—stabbing and biting and gouging and hurting each other; on the left, an 18th-century British officer—in red coat and white wig—lighting the fuse on a cannon. The caption read, “Artillery brings dignity to what would otherwise be a vulgar brawl.”

The same can be said of civility. There is enough stress in what we do that we should not have to endure rudeness—the opposite of civility—from our adversaries. In the words of a former legal assistant of mine, “Rudeness is a little man’s imitation of power.”

In 1989, the Supreme Court and the Court of Criminal Appeals joined in promulgating and adopting, “The Texas Lawyer’s Creed—A Mandate for Professionalism.” I would highlight four provisions of that creed:

“I am obligated to educate my clients, the public, and other lawyers regarding the spirit and letter of this Creed.”

“I will advise my client that civility and courtesy are expected and are not a sign of weakness.”

“I will be courteous, civil, and prompt in oral and written communications.”

“I will treat counsel, opposing parties, the Court, and members of the Court staff with courtesy and civility.”

Now, 24 years have gone by and

more than 40,000 new lawyers have been admitted to practice since the adoption of the creed. As I have visited with judges in cities all over Texas, I have heard a common theme: we need to reemphasize the Lawyer’s Creed. This makes sense to me because I have never seen a copy of the creed in any courtroom in which I have practiced and have never heard a judge tell bickering lawyers to go read the creed—and conduct themselves appropriately. Justice Phil Johnson of the Supreme Court and Judge Mike Keasler of the Court of Criminal Appeals are the liaisons from their courts to the State Bar. I requested that they visit with their colleagues about reaffirming the importance of the creed. As always, they were there to help. Almost immediately, I received word that the justices and judges of the two courts had enthusiastically agreed to enter orders to that effect.

That has now been done. Each order concludes, “As we said in our original order: ‘Let us now as a profession each rededicate ourselves to practice law so we can restore public confidence in our profession, faithfully serve our clients, and fulfill our responsibility to the legal system.’”

So what happens now? Are we just going to say, “Wow!” and forget about it? Absolutely not! Judge Alfonso Charles of the 124th Judicial District Court of Gregg County is the chair of the Judicial Section of the State Bar. He and I have been talking about the creed for at least the past six months. Our goal is for all of the judges of our courts of record to display a poster of

the creed in their courtrooms. The posters would also be available at a reasonable price for the lawyers of Texas with the hope that they would display them in their offices. When the design work on these is completed, the options will be featured in the *Texas Bar Journal*. I will also request that the deans of our Texas law schools display these posters and place a new emphasis on the creed.

Will all of this really make a difference in the way that law is practiced in Texas? That’s your decision.

### MythBusters

**The Myth:** If it’s not drugs or alcohol, the Texas Lawyers’ Assistance Program isn’t interested in you.

**The Problem:** TLAP is most often associated with aiding those who suffer from drug and alcohol abuse; however, depression is also a huge issue for Texas lawyers—and for their colleagues and families. Every year, there are those Texas lawyers who commit suicide because they have run out of hope.

**The Truth:** TLAP volunteers are there for those who need help in a crisis situation—24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Their goal is to save lives, marriages, and law practices. They provide confidential assistance for lawyers, judges, and law students to help with depression, anxiety, and suicide prevention as well as alcohol and substance abuse issues. If you need help, call (800) 343-8527 or visit [texasbar.com/tlap](http://texasbar.com/tlap).