

## Remarks of Steven M. Radke

*The Law School holds an orientation for new law students before classes begin each August and concludes the orientation with the Dean's Reception. The school frequently asks a relatively recent graduate to address the future Marquette lawyers at a short program preceding the reception. This year's speaker was Steven M. Radke, L'02. In introducing him, Professor Peter K. Rofes, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Director of Part-Time Legal Education, recalled Mr. Radke's experience as one of the first students when the Law School's part-time program opened in 1997 and some of Mr. Radke's undertakings since then, most notably as a lobbyist at Northwestern Mutual.*

### Orientation Remarks by Steven M. Radke

**T**hank you, Professor Rofes. I am very honored to be speaking to all of you this evening.

Not so long ago I was sitting where you are—anxiously waiting to begin my legal education. If you had told me then that nine years later, out of all of the outstanding Marquette lawyers in our community, the dean would ask me to come and speak to all of you, I probably would not have believed you.

In fact, when Professor Rofes called to discuss this talk with me, I wondered if I was really the right person for this task. As was noted in my introduction, I am not a practicing lawyer. In fact, as Professor Rofes stated, I practice the often-besmirched, yet I believe still noble, trade known as lobbying.

While I deal with the law everyday, I do it while the law is in its infancy—as it is being crafted by legislators and regulators. You technically don't need to be an attorney to do what I do. But as you will hear later, I believe I am much more effective as a lobbyist because of my legal education.

In addition to being a lobbyist, I cautioned Professor Rofes, my practice is in a relatively narrow field—particularly issues dealing with life insurance. I told him that if he wanted a stem-winder of a speech on Chapter 611 of the Wisconsin Statutes (the section that deals with the governance of mutual life insurance companies), I'm your man. If he wanted to have the new students on the edge of their seats with a discussion of insurable-interest laws—give me a call.

Well, Professor Rofes was persistent. He indicated that he and the dean thought my nontraditional path to law school and the unusual way I use my legal education might provide you all with some different perspectives. I will note that only after I agreed to give this talk was I advised that I would be the only thing between you and free drinks, so I will try to be brief.

I would like to do two things tonight. First, I will offer five pieces of commonsense advice, which—if you keep them



in mind—may make your law school experience, and in particular your first year, a bit more bearable.

Second, I will fast forward to graduation day, and try to briefly explore how you will be different after this experience than you are today.

### **The practical advice**

First, the practical advice, and my first point pertains to your professors. And I apologize in advance to any faculty members present, but please hear me out.

#### **1. Don't expect too much from your professors.**

You will come to class next week, expecting the faculty to be the most important part of your educational process. They are not. Law school is actually a multiyear process of guided self-education.

Let me explain. Most of your educational experiences to date were probably an attempt to transfer a discrete set of knowledge and facts from your teacher to you. You would listen to lectures, take notes, read a text, and ultimately pass the lessons learned back to your teachers on quizzes, midterms, and finals.

Law school is much more than that. Your professors are there to teach you the vocabulary and create a useful structure so you can develop the skills of legal reasoning you will need once you leave Sensenbrenner Hall. In many ways the actual laws you will be learning about are secondary.

It took me a while to appreciate this—actually until I was finished with law school. But when you think about it, this is the only way one can be prepared for a career in the law. The practice of law is so broad and diverse, it is virtually impossible for even the best professor to possibly anticipate the substantive knowledge you will need during your career. I would doubt that any class in this law school even mentions Chapter 611, which is so important to me and several colleague attorneys at Northwestern Mutual. In fact, much of the law you may need to master in your career does not even exist yet.

Although the introduction that you get to substantive law in your classes is essential in the short run, what is really important are the skills of analysis and self-instruction you will be using for the rest of your career.

My next point pertains to how you should conduct yourself in the classroom.

**2. Allow yourself the luxury of an unexpressed thought.** I would imagine that since the earliest days of the Law School back in 1892, there has consistently been a person in virtually every class who always has one more comment to make, one more point to argue, and one more question to ask. There will be someone like this in your class. Respect that person, try to learn from that person—but try not to be that person. Certainly, if you need to have a point clarified, or simply don't grasp a concept, ask. If you are curious about a footnote, ask. Take this unique opportunity to critically analyze others' arguments, and feel free to challenge a point if you disagree. But be respectful of your classmates, and don't monopolize the conversation day in and day out. If, several months from now, you somehow remember these remarks and think to yourself, "Boy, there is no one like that in my class," perhaps it is you!

**3. Take advantage of every opportunity to become a better communicator.** Others will tell you this over and over, and they will do this because it is so true. Your legal writing class may very well be the most important class you take in law school. You can be a legal genius, but if you cannot communicate your thoughts, no one will ever know. In addition to your writing, hone your speaking skills as well. Even if you never step in a courtroom (like me) or are terrified by speaking in front of an audience (like me), the importance of being able to communicate articulately and confidently cannot be overstated, regardless of what field you are in.

**4. For those of you with spouses or significant others.** Over the next few years, you will develop a highly tuned ability to make distinctions that do not make a difference to most people, a capacity to see ambiguity where others see things as crystal clear, and an ability to see issues from all sides. You will be able to artfully manipulate facts and sharply and persuasively argue any point. You will even learn a little Latin.

I have learned from firsthand experience that your spouse is not the appropriate person on whom you should practice any of these skills. My advice for dealing with spouses is simple: tell them often you love them, and

remind them how nice it will be once law school is over.

**5. Relax.** From every fellow law school graduate I spoke with in preparing my remarks, this was the most common piece of advice offered. It is the simplest to understand yet the most difficult to actually implement.

Relax. Take a deep breath.

Grades are important, but they are not all-important. Take time to simply absorb and enjoy the experience you are about to begin. You will forge friendships with other people in this room that will last a lifetime. Cherish these friendships. Take time to read a novel or go see a movie. Leave your books at school over Thanksgiving break—or at least keep them away from the Thanksgiving table!

### **The big picture**

Well, I have finished my first goal. I have imparted the best practical advice I could muster. Now I would like to take my few remaining minutes to offer my thoughts on how you are going to be changed by the education you are about to begin.

I am always a bit troubled when I hear the phrase that law school does not teach you to be a lawyer, it teaches you to “think like a lawyer.” It seems to imply there is a single way lawyers think. When I brought this up with a table full of lawyers, it actually sparked a debate. We discussed what it means to “think like a lawyer,” if lawyers

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really think differently from nonlawyers, if lawyers who practice in one area of the law think differently from practitioners in another area, and if law school changed our way of

thinking or rather we attended law school because we are predisposed to think like lawyers. While we reached no consensus, I concluded that only a table full of lawyers would enjoy such a debate!

Nonetheless, if, God forbid, I someday find myself being wheeled into an emergency room, I hope the person preparing to operate on me doesn't just think like a doctor. I want him or her to *be* a doctor. Ninety credits from now, most of you will be lawyers. And knowing the values and skills Dean Kearney, Professor Rofes, and the rest of the faculty will instill in you, you will be prepared to be very good lawyers.

But how will you be different when you graduate than you are today?

The education you are about to receive will do much, much more than make you a lawyer. It will make you a better citizen, and a better person. You will emerge able to work harder, think more clearly, communicate more effectively, analyze diverse viewpoints, negotiate productively, and apply these disciplines to any field you choose. You will be given the sword to be an effective advocate, and the shield to be a protector of the vulnerable.

A law school education is truly an amazing thing.

There is no other educational experience that could train you for the variety of opportunities that lie ahead of you. A few years from now, one of you will be up here speaking to incoming students. You may be a district attorney, or a member of the plaintiff's bar. You may practice family law, or you may be an expert in the federal tax code.

Some of you may never practice in the traditional



sense. You may be lobbyists or an elected official. I know a lawyer who is the CEO of a Fortune 500 company and a lawyer who owns a pizza restaurant. I know a lawyer who is building a real estate

empire and a lawyer who is raising her children.

What is it about a legal education that trains you equally well to be a CEO or a personal injury attorney or to run a restaurant?

I think in many ways the answer is so simple we often overlook it. Whatever path you follow, you will be using all of the skills you acquire—the ability to ask the right questions, apply solid reasoning, make a persuasive argument—in order to help people solve their problems.

### **Do not forget this.**

Most people reach out to a lawyer when they are in dire straits. When they have nowhere else to turn. When their lives have taken an unfortunate twist. Businesses turn to their attorneys when they need wise counsel and an experienced hand. But they all come with a problem to be solved.

And it is the skill in problem-solving that only a legal education provides that will allow you to help these people. And if you choose not to practice law, it is this problem-solving capability that will allow you to excel in whatever endeavor you choose.

You will begin one of the most exciting journeys of your life next week.

You are at an institution that is prepared to educate you, mind, body, and spirit, to become agents for positive change in society. You will acquire great skills and powerful knowledge.

Enjoy this experience, and remember to use this knowledge wisely.

Thank you again for asking me to join you tonight, and good luck. •