

# ED Update: Lawyers' responsibilities as leaders, mentors

This week, Legal Aid launched recruitment for our Summer Associate program. This program brings in law students from local universities to get real, hands-on experience, while immersing them for the summer in the study and practice of poverty law.

Every year, when we start talking about this program, it makes me think.

As attorneys, we have an immense responsibility not just to our clients, but also to our profession. Part of that responsibility includes ensuring future generations uphold the ethics and standards of practicing law.

We all do this in one way or another, either formally through internship and training programs, or informally through the example we set in each and every case.

So, what example *should* we be setting?

Of course, there's your basic skills and knowledge - the ability to interview a client, to review the merits of a case, to identify the right case strategy and then execute on it. These are all important, no question.

But what about the intangibles - the *essence* of practicing law? What is it that makes a good lawyer? What qualities should we embody so that our new or future attorneys strive to embody them, too? I'm sure we could list dozens, but to keep things brief, I've selected my top three:



**Empathy.** We should approach each situation in our lives, professional or otherwise, with compassion. The ability to see a situation from the other person's perspective is crucial to serving our clients, and to being a good member of the legal field.

**Listening.** Experts say that listening - active listening - is the most important part of effective communication. This means quietly absorbing, then repeating back to the other person our understanding of what they have conveyed. This is critical to our relationships with our clients, and with each other.

**Open mindedness.** In our field, probably more than many others, not jumping to conclusions is critically important. So much so, that we have a whole clause dedicated to it - "innocent until proven guilty." But applying this to any scenario we encounter can only make us better stewards of our profession, and better citizens.

Empathy, listening, and open mindedness. Together, these three qualities lay the groundwork for our profession and give us something to strive for every day. And as we meet new and future lawyers, they give us something

to pass on.

### **Interested in mentoring opportunities?**

Legal Aid's Volunteer Legal Services Program (VSLP) pairs experienced attorneys with those looking for some guidance, either generally or in a specific area of the law. For more information, visit [www.communitylegalaid.org/vlsp](http://www.communitylegalaid.org/vlsp) contact us at [vlsp@communitylegalaid.org](mailto:vlsp@communitylegalaid.org).

Sincerely,



Steven McGarrity, Esq.

Executive Director, Community Legal Aid

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