

Thank you, Chief and welcome to all the admittees, their families and friends. The Justices of the Supreme Court are very pleased to be with you today, even though we must do so remotely. We extend our warm welcome to the legal profession to those of you who have recently been admitted, and to the Vermont bar for you and for any attorneys previously admitted in other states. On behalf of the entire Supreme Court, I congratulate all of you on your great achievement. We wish could be with you in person, but the challenges of these times make that impossible. We hope to meet each of you soon under sunnier skies.

As new lawyers, you are entering the profession at a time unlike any other. This is a period of great challenge, great change and great adaptation in the world and in our profession. As attorneys, it is up to us to meet those challenges and make the changes and adaptations necessary to protect and preserve the rule of law and the system of justice which is built upon it. It is a heavy responsibility, but I know that you will each do your part.

I am sure few of you know the exact path your legal career will take. Regardless of what your path may be, you have the opportunity, whether actively practicing law or not, to make a difference on big stages and on small ones. Especially in these times, in the face of a global pandemic and when it seems that the rule of law is and has been under attack, there is so much to be done. This is such an important time for lawyers, as we work to preserve our legal system and our country's and the world's respect for it.

I hope that you will never forget the exhilaration you felt when you learned you passed the bar exam, the joy of that moment and of this day, and, as importantly, the awesome responsibility that comes with being a lawyer. When times get tough reflect on the sacrifices you and your family have made to get you to this place. It is no small achievement.

It has been my privilege to be a member of the Vermont bar for over forty years. During that time, I have made some observations, some of which I would like to share with you in the hope you may find them useful.

Vermont is a small state with a small bar. The anonymous lawyer is a rarity here. You will become known in your community and in the legal profession. As you start with clean slates, you get to write the first chapter in your "I'm a Vermont attorney" book; make it one which sets the tone for the chapters to be written in the years to come—many of which will be penned by others based upon their dealings with you.

Vermont's small size can work to your advantage. Ask questions of experienced lawyers you meet. You will find most, if not all of them, very willing to share their knowledge with you.

Learn from your experiences. One of the best things about being an attorney is the opportunity to continue to learn and to grow. Your legal education is never completed, there is always something new to learn. The day you think you've "got it" about being an attorney is probably the first day you begin to "lose it."

In order to win the trust of your clients or your employers it is not necessary that you have all the answers. What is important is that you know what you know and recognize what you do not know.

A good lawyer doesn't have all the answers at their fingertips but has the ability to find the answers and the humility to know when research is necessary. Despite your best efforts, you will make mistakes. When you do, learn from them. Strive to be a better lawyer tomorrow than you were today.

You have received a bar admission which reads that you are an "attorney and counsellor at law." Your counselling role with your clients is just as important, if not more so, than your substantive knowledge. What you can do for a client is often different from what you ought to do for them or what they are at first urging you to do. Part of what you bring to your clients is your judgment, not just your legal acumen. Although the final decision may be your client's, do not withhold your counsel, even when it may not be what the client wants to hear.

The legal system has been called an adversary system. But being a good advocate for your client does not mean that you can write a more stinging rebuke than your opposing counsel. The lawyer who gets the best results for the client is not necessarily the one who knows or uses the most adjectives.

The electronic world has changed the practice of law in many good ways and in a few bad ones. It remains to be seen what the impact of remote hearings and yes, even remote trials, will be. When we come out of this pandemic one thing is certain----the practice of law will be different than it was when we went into to it. We communicate so often now by rapid and remote means, rather than in person. This lends itself well to incivility, which has become more prevalent in recent years. I would ask you to remember that incivility is not advocacy, nor is it effective lawyering. The Vermont Bar Directory contains the Guidelines of Professional Courtesy which the Bar Association membership adopted in 1989. I commend them to you.

If you are in a contested matter, learn to win with humility and to lose with grace. Remember: the other side feels as strongly about their position as you and your client do about yours.

As you start this chapter of your legal career, challenge yourself to be good stewards of the law. Our legal system works because people put their trust in it. Make it your goal to uphold that trust and to further it, so that many years from now, upon your retirement, people will say that you were a good lawyer and an honest person.

Being a lawyer is difficult; the work is hard, and the demands are many. The Supreme Court, in connection with the VBA, continues to work on important issues concerning attorney wellness. We see all too often lawyers neglecting their own physical, emotional or mental well-being, often with sad, if not disastrous, results. Keep a distance between your client's problems and your personal life. You cannot serve your clients or your profession if you do not take care of your own mental and physical health.

That starts with taking the time to decompress. The practice of law is as draining as it is rewarding. You have to keep sacred the time to do the things you enjoy and the things that help you to relax. Believe it or not, in the not too distant past, there was a time without cell phones. Remember to turn yours off from time to time. It is not your responsibility to be available to your clients 24/7

even if they think that it is. If, despite your best efforts you find yourself becoming overwhelmed, reach out to the Bar Association's lawyer assistance program or to a colleague for help.

Justice must always mean more than who can shout the longest or the loudest. We all must ensure that the weak as well as the strong are heard; that the poor as well as the rich have a playing field that is level for everyone; and that we as attorneys do no falsehood nor delay any person for lucre or malice. These are the things which serve to maintain public confidence in the legal system. It is our responsibility and our duty to fight for these things with all our combined strength every day of our legal career. The challenges of today will give way to the challenges of tomorrow, but we must always rise to meet them, whatever they may be.

The legal profession in all its varied aspects is bigger than any one of us, but its vitality, and the public's confidence in it depends upon all of us. Each of us as attorneys have a shared responsibility to make the legal profession all that it can be and all that it needs to be.

As you begin your career as a Vermont attorney, I leave you with this quote from "A Commencement for Scoundrels" by Samuel Hazo:

I wish you what I wish
myself: hard questions
and the nights to answer them,
the grace of disappointment
and the right to seem the fool
for justice. That's enough.
Cowards might ask for more.
Heroes have died for less.

Thank you, welcome to the Vermont bar, and good luck to you all.

It is now my pleasure to introduce the Executive Director of the Vermont Bar Association, Attorney Teri Corsones.