

Bar Admission Ceremony
November 2, 2015
Remarks by Justice Robinson

Good afternoon and congratulations on this very special occasion.

On behalf of myself and my colleagues on the Connecticut Supreme Court, I am honored to welcome you here today as we prepare to admit you to the bar of the state of Connecticut. I'm certain that this has been a long journey for you and for your family members and friends, and I commend you on your hard work, resilience and perseverance.

For almost 16 years now I have had the privilege and honor of serving the people of this state as a judge and justice of our court systems. For the last eight years I have served as a member of our appellate courts. One of things I have enjoyed the most about being an appellate jurist is the yearly opportunity to hire a recent law school graduate as my term law clerk for the year. For me, this is one of the best parts of the job, and I imagine my

colleagues agree. Each year, the new law clerks bring energy, enthusiasm and new ideas to the court.

Not only do these fresh minds keep us on our toes—encouraging us to continue learning about the law and to discuss new ideas and approaches—but they also give us a chance to share our years of experience with them. They influence our thinking; we influence their thinking; and the law, I believe, benefits from our collective wisdom. In short, they reassure me that the new generation of lawyers, your generation of lawyers, is well-equipped to face the challenges of the future.

As you surely know, the legal field is undergoing significant changes these days. In the face of increasing economic pressures, corporate and individual clients are cutting back, demanding more affordable legal advice and services and seeking alternative fee arrangements.

The number of self-represented parties has increased significantly during recent times and is likely to continue increasing. This imbalance in representation raises a whole host of issues because it challenges the very premise of our adversarial system, which is designed to permit well-matched opponents to present their best evidence and arguments for consideration and resolution by an impartial judge.

Finally, new technologies are altering our profession dramatically—they are changing the way people seek legal advice, the way attorneys offer legal advice, the way courts resolve disputes and the way we learn and share information about the law.

We now have access to information and the ability to communicate at all times of the day and night. These technologies in some ways increase the pace and the pressures of the practice of law. At the same time, they make it easier for us

to be informed, to inform others, and to ensure that everyone has fair access to our legal system.

Although many of these changes bring uncertainty, they also bring incredible opportunity, especially for those of you who are just starting out. In the words of Nido Qubein, "Your present circumstances don't determine where you can go; they merely determine where you start." If you have a vision for the future and the drive to make it come true, there is no telling what your future holds.

As you form your vision for the future, however, I hope that you will consult with experienced attorneys and judges so that you can learn from their successes and failures. Denis Waitley, a motivational speaker, once said, "Learn from the past, set vivid, detailed goals for the future, and live in the only moment of time over which you have any control: now." I believe that this is the challenge for the legal profession. Experienced attorneys must

be open to new ideas, goals and innovative approaches; new attorneys must be willing to study and learn from past successes and failures; and together, we need to apply this collective wisdom to the problems we're facing right now.

I'll leave it to your generation to come up with new ideas, goals and innovative approaches, although I certainly wish I were among those of you who are just starting out! With respect to the past, however, we have plenty to share. Over the years, as an attorney, as a judge, and as a justice of this honorable court, I've shared the courtroom with countless attorneys. When I think of the lawyers I admire most, however, they all seem share an understanding that our legal system, while adversarial, is more of a chess match than a war.

These attorneys know the strengths and weaknesses of their cases and do their best with the material they've been given. They are honest in dealing with their clients, with their opponents

and with the court, acknowledging weaknesses up front and focusing on strengths. They are cognizant of their obligation to their client but they don't lose sight of their role as an officer of the court. In other words, they defend their clients zealously, but they don't go so far as to strain the truth or damage either their professional reputation or the rule of law. They make their point in a professional and civil manner, and have no need to resort to bluster, hyperbole or personal attacks. In sum, they are civil, they are honorable and they are trustworthy.

Additionally, I admire the attorneys who are willing devote their precious time expertise to doing pro bono work. There have always been many maxims about the danger of representing one's self, but we are currently in the midst of a "self-rep' tsunami," as Mark Dubois, the former President of the Connecticut Bar Association, recently noted.

As Jona Goldschmidt recognized in "The Pro Se Litigant's

Struggle for Access to Justice: Meeting the Challenge of Bench and Bar Resistance," there are "[m]ultiple causes . . . for this trend, including increased literacy, consumerism, a sense of rugged individualism, the costs of litigation and attorneys' fees, antilawyer sentiment, and the breakdown of family and religious institutions that formerly resolved many disputes that are now presented to [our] courts"

By offering pro bono services to self-represented parties, attorneys help people to solve some of their most difficult problems, but they also help the legal system, by ensuring that all sides are fairly represented, and that the court is given the necessary tools to see that justice is done.

Last but by no means least, when I talk to attorneys who do pro bono work, they inevitably talk about how good it feels to help others, and how wonderful they feel knowing that they have made a real and positive difference in peoples' lives.

As you contemplate your future, and as you work with your colleagues to address the challenges facing our profession and our legal system, I urge you to study and learn from those who have come before you. To paraphrase Robert Penn Warren, "history cannot give us a program for the future, but it can give us a fuller understanding of ourselves, and [our circumstances] so that we can better face [it]." There is no question in my mind that we are well equipped to address our current problems and to face those that will come in the future. With the combined forces of your enthusiasm, energy and innovative ideas with our wisdom and experience we will not only preserve the greatest legal system in the world but improve it.

Congratulations and welcome to your future, welcome to the Connecticut bar.