

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE LSNP AT THE ANNUAL
DEAN'S MERIT LIST FUNCTION OF THE FACULTY OF LAW AT THE UNIVERSITY
OF PRETORIA ON 24 APRIL 2014**

All protocol observed.

Dear friends, colleagues, ladies & gentlemen

By developing access to justice, we strive to provide the vital infrastructure to a fair, progressive and transparent society, where we are able to accelerate law reform to the benefit of the country. South-Africa is in constant dire need for inward intellectual investment.

Notably, you are starting your careers on the eve of a magnitude of recent developments in our profession, pending finality on the Legal Practice Bill and numerous other legislation currently under scrutiny. We have indeed more that binds us, than separates us, and we have much to learn and share with one another. This occasion represents a red letter date on the University's calendar and you all looked forward with great anticipation to finally reaching this date. Seize the moment today to capture what I like to consider to be the cradle of law related debate in an ever increasingly globalizing world with its challenges and opportunities in this modern world of technology in an era where the rule of law and justice for all are so often uniquely, articulated in the domestic concept of "Ubuntu". Do not be an elusive participant in the law sphere but exchange experiences, interact with likeminded lawyers, renew and build new friendships to continue long after the closing speeches of this evening. Why not constantly involve yourself with thought provoking deliberations and become renowned for aspiring to be the best. Empower yourselves with knowledge.

This University has always been committed to upholding the highest standards of ethics, integrity, equality and diversity which is a trademark later in your career and profession. The University of Pretoria have embarked in a strategy to train excellent lawyers, critical thinkers and virtuous leaders guided by justice through the creation of knowledge in legal theory and practice. Tonight is a memorable occasion where you are bestowed with a great honour. It marks and indicates a clear sign of confidence imposed on you by your Alma Mater. To improve is to change, to be perfect is to change often. Your unfettered commitment to your academic career is but one of the demonstrative ways in which you showed your optimism to embark on the daunting career path that lies ahead, sometimes going through turbulent waters. You have all discharged your mandate at University with flying colours. You will experience teething problems but also imminent success if you persist. It is said that one can always count on lawyers to do the right thing, after they have tried everything else. Now is the time to fine tune your academic success with practice. The law is currently both radical and progressive as it provides huge opportunities for young practitioners and opens the possibilities of more economic professional services to our citizens.

Knowledge is to know that a tomato is a fruit; wisdom is to know and understand that it should not be used in a fruit-salad.

Albert Einstein once remarked *“The one who follows the crowd will usually get no further than the crowd. The one, who walks alone, is likely to find himself in places no one has ever been.”*

Most successful young legal practitioners will tell you that their primary motivation is to “*change the world*” and to build something lasting, not to make a lot of money. But the conventional wisdom is that legal practitioners of all ages work very hard for their money, above all else. Yet my own experience, and a recent McKinsey Survey, leads me to believe that non-cash motivators may be more effective in the long term for your career than financial incentives.

I agree with Charles P. Garcia, who ties motivation most strongly to leadership, in his book “*Leadership Lessons of the White House Follows*”, based on this group of more than 600 prominent leaders from every sector of American society. They assert that employees value having strong leaders, who incent them to do their best, just as much if not more than money.

I submit that this same principle will apply to each one of you in your chosen career path. For action, the following list of principles for practitioners, derived from numerous text books of some of the world’s greatest leaders, finds favour despite sometimes low morale following tough economic, social and political times and where budgets are cut to the bone. My intention is not to deliver a cheesy speech, but please bear with me for a while.

1. **Energize yourself**

Instead of being the type of practitioner who sucks the energy away from others, resolve to be the kind of legal practitioner who strives to bring passion and positive energy to the workplace every day. You have just completed your studies (most of you, anyway). You have pulled through difficult periods to get here. It is time you display some positive energy.

2. **There's more to life than work**

Great leaders and practitioners have deep reserves of physical, spiritual, and emotional energy, and that energy is usually fueled by a strong and supportive relationship with the people they love, regular exercise, a healthy lifestyle, and setting aside time for reflection.

3. **Put your people first**

No organization is better than the people who run it. The fact is that you are in the people business – the business of working with, training and managing people to deliver the product or service you provide. If the people you surround yourself with are the engine of your success, to be a great practitioner you need to attend to your people with a razor-sharp focus. Choose who you associate with wisely.

4. **Act with integrity**

In a time when news reports are filled with the stories of private and public leaders who have acted inappropriately and have gone against the best interest of their employees, clients or whoever else, showing that you value integrity can help motivate people and create a sense of pride for your organization. In any event, integrity is a key principle to the legal profession.

5. **Be a great communicator**

Leadership is influencing others, and this cannot be achieved without effective communication. If you are struggling with communicating, first work on your ability to influence individuals by choosing words that are impactful to carry your message. Then you need to figure out how to communicate to a larger audience. To effectively communicate is a core trait of any legal practitioner. Do not be afraid to stand for what you believe in, even if that means standing alone.

6. **Be a great listener**

The most effective legal practitioners are the ones who take the time to listen not just to their client and colleagues' words but to the priceless hidden meaning beneath them. Remember that during good times and bad, sometimes your clients and personnel just need someone to talk to. Communicate to them that you are always waiting with open ears.

7. **Be a problem solver**

Post a sign above your office door that reads: *"Don't Bring Me Problems, Bring Me Solutions."* Set about the task of guiding each person on your team toward the goal of becoming a top-notch problem solver during this crucial period. Lawyers are problem solvers. If it was not so a client would have solved his/her problem themselves, without having to pay for it to be done.

8. **Lead through experience and competence, not through title or position**

Mentor your subordinates, encourage them, make partners out of them, and your organization is sure to benefit. If you want to survive the tough economy, that is exactly the kind of leadership motif you need for your organization/firm. Although people are eager to crack a joke about an attorney, generally speaking people will look up to you as a professional person.

The fundamentals of leadership do not change between good times and bad. But when money is in short supply, these principles can be the difference between success and failure, staying in practice or being struck off. Now is the time to start motivating yourself by applying these principles and that will lead you through the hard times.

9. **Confidence**

There may be days where the future of your firm is worrisome and things are not going according to plan. This is true with any business, large or small, and the most important thing is not to panic. Part of your job as a practitioner is to put out fires and maintain the team morale. Keep up your confidence level, and assure everyone (especially your clients) that setbacks are natural and the important thing is to focus on the larger goal. By staying calm and confident, you will help keep the team at your office feeling the same. Remember, the members at your firm and people in general will take cues from you, so if you exude a level of calm damage control, it will be picked up. The key objective is to keep everyone working and moving ahead. Napoleon once remarked: *"The world suffers a lot. Not because of the violence of bad people. But because of the silence of good people."* If friendship is your weakest point, then you are the strongest person in the world. I am thankful to all those who said NO to me, because it is as a result of them that I did it myself.

10. **Commitment**

If you expect to gain trust to build a worthwhile reputation, to excel, then you will have to work hard and produce quality content and you are going to need to lead by example. There is no greater motivation than seeing the boss down in the trenches working alongside everyone else, showing that hard work is being done on every level. By proving your commitment to the firm and the profession and your role, you will not only earn the respect of your peers, but will also instill that same hardworking energy among your own staff. It is important to show your commitment not only to the work at hand, but also to your promises. If you pledged to host a holiday party, or uphold casual Fridays, keep your word. You want to create a reputation for not just working hard, but also be known as a fair leader and legal practitioners. Once you have gained such respect you are more likely to receive the peak amount of quality work possible.

“Dot it or not. There is no try.” Your principle (attorney) will at some stage give you what you will consider to be an impossible task. Do not say: *“Okay, I will try”*. You will be able to finish it as long as you do not quit. *“Trying”* should not enter into the mind frame. Persistence is all that matter.

Often we say, *“I’ll try ...”* because it gives us an out. Once we say, *“I will,”* our perspective changes. What previously seemed insurmountable is no longer a matter of luck or change but of time and effort and persistence.

When what you want to do really matters, never say, *“I’ll try”*. Say, *“I will,”* and keep that promise to yourself.

11. **Stop waiting for the “right time.” Success is a numbers game : the number of times you take a shot**

You will never create the perfect pleading or contract, never find the perfect partners for your firm, the perfect clients, the perfect location, but you can find the perfect time to start.

That time is now.

Talent, experience, and connections are important, but put your all into enough new things and some will work. Take enough shots and over time you will grow more skilled, more experienced, and more connected. And that will mean a greater percentage of your efforts will succeed. Take enough shots, learn from what did not work, and in time you will have all the skills, experience, and connections you need.

Ultimately success is all about taking your shot, over and over again. Sometimes you may win, sometimes you will definitely lose, but the more things you try the more chances you have of succeeding. Put the power of numbers on your side. Take as many shots as you can. There is no guarantee of success, but when you do not take a shot, there is a definite guarantee of failure.

12. **Resentment is like drinking poison and expecting the other guy to die**

The same holds for bitterness, jealousy and dislike. Let it go. If you do not, the only loser is you.

13. **The extra mile is a vast, unpopulated wasteland**

Everyone says they go the extra mile, but almost no one actually does. Most people think, *“Wait ... no one else is here ... why am I doing this?”*

That is why the extra mile is such a lonely place. That is also why the extra mile is a place filled with opportunities. Be early. Stay late. Make the extra phone call. Send the extra e-mail. Do the extra research. Help a client or opponent wherever possible. Do not wait to be asked, but rather offer. Every time you do something, think of one extra thing you can do – especially if other people are not doing that one thing. Sure, it is hard work.

But that is what will make you different – and over time will make you incredibly successful.

14. **Only a genius can do things his own way. You? You’re no genius**

If you are the type of young legal practitioner who keeps questioning what you are told to do, you have a problem. Practice in no uncertain terms, will set you straight. It is okay to reinvent the wheel, but only after you know how the current wheel works. Never assume you know better when you do not really know anything.

15. **If you want to know how much you will be missed when you are gone, put your finger in a bucket of water and then remove it. The hole that is left will be how much you are missed**

No one is irreplaceable. No one. Instead of depressing, the thought that we are professionally replaceable is liberating. You may not leave a hole, but you can leave a mark on a person, a client, a court, a colleague or a culture that lives on after you are gone.

You may not be missed but you can be remembered – in the best possible way.

16. **We all have limits. Almost no one reaches theirs. You definitely have not**

You could swim faster if a shark was on your tail. You could run faster if your child was in danger. You could work harder if the payoff was truly exceptional.

What we think we can do is always – always – less than what we can do if we really, really try. We always have a little more in us. Find your true limits and you may find that success is limitless.

17. **Unless you are the lead dog in the sled, the view never changes**

Following the crowd means living the same life as the crowd. You do not want that.

18. **There are two types of pain you will go through in life: the pain of discipline and the pain of regret. Discipline weighs ounces while regret weighs tons**

The worst words you can say are, "*I just wish I had ...*" Push yourself to do what you hope to do ... so you will never have to regret not having tried.

DR. L G CURLEWIS

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