

## Lunch with Legends DAN GOYETTE

T. Paul Chumbley

Often times, words denoting excellence or quality are used so frequently that they become devoid of any true meaning. Things are described as “incredible” or “amazing” to the point that the words become mere potholes to be driven over rather than stop signs requiring the reader to pause and truly appreciate the significance of what is being described.

It was with this background that I volunteered for the LBA's *Lunch with Legends* with Dan Goyette, this month's subject. “Legend” is perhaps the simplest and most accurate descriptor for such an accomplished attorney.

Known for his ever-busy schedule, indefatigable work ethic and the late hours he keeps, I'm told it should have come as no surprise that, after months of false starts, this “lunch with a legend” (one who usually doesn't take time for lunch) ultimately became the first “dinner with a legend.” In talking with Mr. Goyette over the course of our meal, his demeanor was without any sort of pretension or desire for attention. His expertise and knowledge is widely recognized, yet he would be the last one to mention any of his accomplishments. In fact, more than once he expressed dismay about the nature of this article and being termed a legend for any purpose.

Mr. Goyette's humility notwithstanding, at this point in his career, it's realistically easier to list the organizations that have not recognized him for his legal skill and service. In addition to the LBA, the Department of Public Advocacy, American Bar Association, Kentucky Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and Kentucky Bar Association have all recognized his contributions and work in the field of law, some on more than one occasion.

While he is perhaps most well known for his service to clients in need, he has long been a contributor to the legal community as a whole.

Since 1979, he has been an adjunct faculty member at the Brandeis School of Law at the University of Louisville. He is the past president of the Louisville Bar Association and the Louisville Bar Foundation; a charter member of the Louis D. Brandeis American Inn of Court and chair of its Membership and Governance Committee; a charter board member and past president of the Kentucky Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers; a past president of the Kentucky Academy of Justice; and a charter member of the American Council of Chief Defenders. Since 2011, he has been a member of the American Bar Association Standing Committee of Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants.

It would be easy enough to write an article that simply recounted the accolades that Mr. Goyette received throughout his career (see above for a partial list) or the United States Supreme Court cases that he's been a part of (there have been six to date). However, merely recounting these things does a disservice to the work of the man who has helped—and continues to help—numerable individuals and shaped the role of public advocacy in the Commonwealth of Kentucky as the Executive Director/Chief Public Defender for the Louisville Metro Public Defender's office since 1982.

In the law, especially in litigation, an appreciation that a case could take years of hard work, late nights, and

contentious court appearances to complete is a requirement. When discussing his approach to his work, he provided advice as sound as one would expect. While he may have other pointers, the main points I took away after our meal are as follows:

1. The client's interests are primary. It's important to always be in tune, and aware of, what is best for the client. It sounds simple enough, but Mr. Goyette cautioned against letting emotion or pride cloud the attorney's judgment in representing the client. When the facts are against the client, even mitigating the circumstances can make all the difference in a case.
2. Work the case. Any time an attorney walks into a courtroom without an argument to make, or a theory of the case, that attorney has not worked the case hard enough. Reviewing documents, evidence, testimony, and any and everything in the file is imperative if the client is going to be zealously represented.
3. Be yourself. Authenticity is important. Like any profession, there are innumerable personalities among the local bar. Different attorneys have different approaches, and that is fine. Where attorneys fail themselves and, more importantly, their clients, is when the attorney tries to act like someone he or she is not.
4. Avoid the “Martyr Syndrome.” Bad days happen. Unexpected rulings and events are to be expected. All attorneys have bad days. It's imperative, though, to acknowledge what happened, deal with it however you need to, and quickly move on so that the client's interests don't become secondary to the attorney's emotions.
5. Work (ever harder). Without a strong work ethic—a willingness to put in the time and effort to do what's best for the client—an attorney does a disservice to him/herself, the client, and the practice of law.

Mr. Goyette has not advanced as far as he has in the legal profession by shirking his responsibilities as an attorney. It was obvious that he takes a great deal of pride in doing the necessary work—the unglamorous behind-the-scenes work—that no one will ever see or know about.

Mr. Goyette also referenced a quote from Alan Dershowitz during our time together:

*“We've all heard the cliché that ‘nobody on their death bed ever regretted not having spent more time at the office.’ Sure! If you achieved a high degree of professional and financial success during your lifetime. But the reality is that there are many people who should regret not having spent more time at work. These are the people who*



*failed to achieve their potential because of laziness or misplaced priorities.*

I cannot think of a better way to summarize his attitude toward his work. Mr. Goyette is a man who cares for his clients. He talked of relationships developed over the course of cases, some of which can take decades to resolve. It's equally apparent that his clients care for him. They know and trust him implicitly, and value the work he puts in. In fact, one former client's final wish was that Mr. Goyette would deliver the eulogy at the client's funeral (and he did).

Throughout our meal, Mr. Goyette recounted the facts of landmark cases in which he's participated as casually as someone may recall a conversation with friends. That's not to say that his casualness was dismissive, or that he takes cases for granted. Someone with his experience knows the law well, and in great detail, and this knowledge and comfort with his line of work was as apparent as it was impressive. It was clear that Mr. Goyette is the personification of the attorney who has forgotten more law than most will ever know.

Just because the work isn't easy or glamorous—it's rarely either—doesn't mean it's not worthwhile. It was especially impactful to hear someone as accomplished as Mr. Goyette reiterate that point. When everything is said and done, and the case is resolved, the effort will speak for itself. That's just the way Dan Goyette would have it.

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