

## What is Professionalism?

By Keith A. Birkes

Webster defines professionalism to be the conduct, aims or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or professional person. I think every member of The Missouri Bar could list various qualities that are important to professional behavior. Confidence, diplomacy, patience, respect, courtesy ... and the list goes on.

Virtually every one of us has witnessed or experienced incivility from other members of the legal profession at least occasionally. Complete professionalism is our goal, but we know that will be very difficult to attain.

The Missouri Bar does much to encourage professionalism. Those programs and activities include required professionalism and ethics courses as part of our mandatory continuing legal education requirement in Missouri. We also have programs to resolve disputes between lawyers and their clients regarding fees, communications and minor complaints. In addition, a relatively new program addresses disputes that may arise between lawyers, particularly in

the context of law firm break-ups. And an active and comprehensive lawyers' assistance program aids those bar members who may be impaired for various reasons.

The Missouri Bar also works actively with our law schools to provide information about professionalism to those who are studying to become members of The Missouri Bar. Additionally, we do our best to inform the public about what to expect from competent and qualified professional lawyers. Codes of professional behavior are also distributed in a variety of forms as a reminder to Missouri lawyers to aspire to the highest levels of civility.

Meanwhile, The Missouri Bar's Task Force on Professionalism, chaired by President-Elect H.A. "Skip" Walther of Columbia, continues to both define and quantify the state of professionalism in Missouri. A recently completed survey that was electronically sent to more than 3,000 members of The Missouri Bar produced great evidence of professionalism, and the lack thereof, within The Missouri Bar.

The Office of Chief Disciplinary

Counsel in Missouri also cooperates and contributes to virtually every program presented to Missouri lawyers in order that they can better understand the Rules of Professional Conduct and their enforcement in Missouri. Lawyer advertising is another matter that falls under the jurisdiction of the Office of Chief Disciplinary Counsel when it violates the Rules.

In this issue of *Precedent*, the topic of civility will be thoroughly explored. At the same time our task force continues to consider additional programs and activities The Missouri Bar can pursue to help members satisfy their obligations to the public and our profession. I look forward to continuing to work with all members of The Missouri Bar to achieve those qualities of professionalism to which we all aspire.



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