

Pay It Forward:

Strengthening the Louisiana Bar Foundation Through Civility

by Michael J. Mestayer, 2026-27 Louisiana Bar Foundation President

One of the great benefits of the office of President of the Louisiana Bar Foundation is the opportunity to address the thousands of lawyers who make up the Louisiana State Bar Association. For those of you who pored over my responses to the annual President's Interview, as I am sure all of you did, you will know that civility in the practice of law is something that I hope to regain, at least in part, this coming year. The Louisiana Bar Foundation and its great work to aid the less fortunate members of our community with their civil legal needs can help in that regard. Civility and generosity to the underprivileged community can translate into civility toward your opponent in your practice. As an example of that notion, I offer the following anecdotes.

One Day

One day, I'm going to write something about that. We all say it. We all think it. Well, maybe not ALL of us, but certainly there must be someone else who thinks that. In any event, I was lamenting the fact that for years I have been working on an article for my law school class that I affectionately call, "Honey, Baby, Sugar, Darling." Now, before you call me sexist, the point of the article is to explain in simple terms the notion of the Law of Reciprocity. Basically, if I do something nice for you, without being asked for that action, then you feel compelled to do something nice for me. Waitresses [servers] in the South have been using that notion for years. Why? It works.

So, you are probably wondering to yourself how that notion has any relevance to the practice of law. I think I know the

answer. In law school and in practice, we are taught that we are adversaries; the other side is wrong and always wrong. Only in total victory can we deem ourselves successful attorneys. WRONG. The practice of law isn't now, and never has been, about total victory. It is about righting wrongs in a just and fair manner. We have far too much to worry about without layering on needless and wasteful fights over meaningless issues in our practice.

Use the Law of Reciprocity to make your work life a little better. Don't wait for your opponent to request production of critical documents and information that you know will eventually be needed by both sides. Send it over without a request. "I know you will be asking for the names of all the medical providers and their records, so here they are. If you need anything else, just let me know."

Your opponent will be shocked that you took that action, but once he/she overcomes that surprise action, you will find that cooperation unfolds in many ways. Only someone who has no outside life has never had a conflict between their personal life and their professional schedule. So, the next time such a conflict arises and you need to move that deposition to another date, continue that motion to another setting, or any of the other myriad deadlines we all face, if you were the cooperative one, you will receive cooperation in return. You'll be glad you took that first step.

Addendum:

After the above was prepared, a new Gallup poll was released on April 26, 2026, that indicated that for every act of kindness we receive, we perform an act of kindness

for another. In fact, 65% of Americans say that they had recently received an act of kindness from someone in their "community" in the previous week. Older Americans, particularly in the South, reported the most acts of kindness. Surprisingly, younger Americans [ages 18-29] reported seeing acts of kindness the least.

The pollsters concluded that perhaps performing or even noticing acts of kindness is a learned behavior — hence, a prime opportunity for the older legal community to not only mentor younger lawyers, but also to demonstrate the reciprocity that doing good produces. Pay it forward — it'll come back around. Becoming a member of the LBF where you can help others will help lift your spirits as well.

Just Join

Feeling isolated? Weighed down by the political rhetoric? Social media, the notion touted as the great gatherer of communities, seems to actually turn community against community while feeding us less and less of "the other side" until we all believe the division is truly real. Visualize a whirlpool spinning in tighter and tighter circles. That is the effect that many sense.

To dispel that notion, join something that piques your interest. Expand your community. Hopefully that interest will include the LBF or one of the more than 70 partner organizations that the LBF supports. Help to spread the idea that in the civil arena, there can be equal and fair access to justice. You'll not only help others and your community, but you'll help yourself.

