



PROFILE IN PROFESSIONALISM

2010 Seventh Circuit Professionalism Award Recipient

Daniel Webb, Esquire

In every aspect of our economic and social lives, we search for the “gold standard.” As former Governor James Thompson said of Dan Webb, the co-recipient of the 2010 American Inns of Court’s Professionalism Award for the Seventh Circuit, “Dan Webb is the gold standard of the legal profession. No general counsel, or CEO, or board of directors could ever be criticized for hiring Dan Webb—whatever the outcome of the litigation. No white collar criminal defendant has ever met the enormous weight of a federal criminal prosecution with a better defender than Dan Webb—compensated or pro bono.”

Webb is a partner in the litigation department and serves as chairman of Winston & Strawn in Chicago. Under Webb’s leadership, Winston & Strawn has grown into a highly regarded international firm. He has established himself as one of the nation’s premier litigators. Judge Ilana Diamond Rovner of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit put it this way: “He is a virtuoso of the courtroom.... Purely and simply, Dan is *number one*. He was born to be a litigator.”

Perhaps most revealing of Dan Webb’s character and professionalism is his desire to give back to the poor and underrepresented. He assumed the chairmanship of the Chicago Bar Foundation’s 2008 Campaign for Justice. The Chicago Bar Foundation described in 2006 the dilemma that less than 300 legal aid attorneys in the Chicago area struggled to serve more than one million low-income residents and nearly half of those attorneys would be forced to leave their jobs in the near future due to unbearable educational debt and chronic low pay. That study concluded that more than half of the disadvantaged Chicagoans could be turned away to solve complex legal problems on their own.

In just six months, Webb mobilized nearly 40 law firms and corporate legal departments to help address this looming crisis. He persuaded several other law firms to participate in the effort and inspired more than 100 volunteers to conduct a city-wide pledge campaign. This generated over \$1 million to significantly increase compensation of Chicago’s legal aid attorneys and keep them on the job. He also significantly expanded Winston & Strawn’s *pro bono* program. Under his leadership,

Winston attorneys now devote nearly 40,000 hours to *pro bono* cases and transactions each year.

As U.S. Attorney for Chicago between 1981 and 1984, Webb will always be remembered for spearheading the Operation Greylord investigations into judicial corruption in Cook County, Illinois. Ultimately, that investigation put 76 judges, lawyers, court personnel, and police officers in prison. He also won convictions during that time against 10 Chicago police officers charged with extorting money from heroin dealers in exchange for protecting narcotics shipments. Webb is still well known for his conviction of retired Admiral John Poindexter as a special prosecutor in the 1989 obstruction-of-Congress case, also known as the Iran Contra affair.

For these and similar achievements during his long legal career, Webb received The American Jewish Committee’s 2004 Judge Learned Hand Human Relations Award, which honors those who have demonstrated a life-long commitment to “combating all forms of discrimination and bigotry, promoting human rights and advocating public policy rooted in American democratic values.” In accepting that honor, Webb observed that the most important trait he may have had in common with the great jurist was a “love and admiration” for the American legal system. As Webb stated, Judge Hand knew that the “true spirit of liberty” does not exist just in the U.S. Constitution or even just in the laws or the courts of this nation. The spirit of liberty, Webb noted, “exists in the hearts and souls of real people that work hard every day” to promote its ideals and principles for the common good. Characteristically, he concluded that the “real representatives” of what Judge Hand called the “spirit of liberty” are the judges exercising their independent judgment “regardless of personal beliefs or economic advantage,” the lawyers working hard to advance the interests of their clients, the business people maintaining the “highest integrity” in their dealings, and the persons of different faiths or political ideologies “working together for common goals.”

Dan Webb might tell you that he does not have much in common with Judge Learned Hand. But embodying as he does the “spirit of liberty,” he is a force for all that is good about our legal profession. He is indeed the gold standard, a role model for all young lawyers, and why we honor his example. ♦