

Family, friends, distinguished faculty, and fellow graduates - Of all the people out there, there's one person I'd like to meet. By far this person wields more power than any person in this room. People are constantly charged with the responsibility of living up to this person's expectations. In fact, soon, clients will be paying us to figure this person out. Cases will hinge on whether someone acted as he would act or simply ignored his judgment. Oddly, this mystery man isn't any more intelligent than any of us. While we have learned to write, think, and speak like lawyers, he just plods through his daily routine -- perhaps never even giving the legal system a second thought.

His name, of course, is Reasonable Man and we've also come across his politically correct twin, Reasonably Prudent Person.

So why do we all defer to his judgment? You see, WE persuade, that's our job. HE reacts, that's his. Most of us first heard about him in Torts. And since then, we've seen him make cameo appearances in most of our classes. It seems that each industry packages him according to its own norms and standards. Inevitably, we always wind up asking the same question "Given these set of circumstances, did the defendant act like a reasonably prudent person?"

Yes, it's hard to believe that it was three years ago when we read Justice Cardozo's opinion, for example, that a reasonably prudent landowner would anticipate certain dangerous conditions. Reasonably Prudent Landowner would take reasonable measures to protect trespassing young lads of 16. And now, three years, three deans, and countless caffeinated beverages later, here we are. In cap and gown.

I have to ask. Given our set of circumstances, would reasonably prudent Cardozo students have done anything differently? Probably. But we're not on trial here; we're at Graduation. Instead, I'd like to draw upon our collective circumstance and put forth a mode of conduct for reasonable Cardozo alums.

Every reaction has a time and a place- sadness, elation, silence, and conversation, all have their time under the sun. According to Maimonides, a Rabbinic philosopher of the 12th Century, however, there is one exception. Arrogance has no place. For some reason, the noble profession we've chosen has been accused of rampant egoism. As we leave formal schooling behind, there is something that should keep us in check. No matter how well we may present our stellar arguments, no matter how persuasive our reasoning, if it doesn't pass muster by our ordinary friend, Reasonable Man, it just doesn't matter. Humbling, isn't it.

But how else can we keep things in perspective as we ride the fine line being proud of our accomplishments and becoming another lawyer joke? Think back. Before law school, we were de facto reasonable. Reasonable as opposed to rash, calm as opposed to convoluted. We're still the same sensible people we were three years ago (most of us anyway). In any case, now, for better or worse, discerning the reasonable course of action defines what we do. People will come to us with questions and we must exude confidence as we answer them. Legal proficiency is not enough. Sure, we can't forget to shepardize or look at the latest statute. But we're counselors now. Whatever field we're in, from public interest to public offerings, people will be relying on our judgment.

To some extent, we all have to admit that the prospect is both daunting and exhilarating. Three years ago, if you recall, we had a similar outlook regarding a task which is now behind us. But with encouragement from those who stood with us during these three years - friends, family, and each other. I'm sure we'll continue to rise to any occasion. To our relatives and friends who were there for us, I say "thank you."

To the professors who guided us through classes, clinics, competitions, and journals, an anonymous quote comes to mind. "Give a person a fish and they can eat for a day, teach a person how to fish and they eat for life" -- Professors, thank you for a most enlightening fishing expedition.

It's a good thing professors here have encouraged us to "think like lawyers" and "write like lawyers." Strangely, once we finally thought we had it down pat, in ITAP for instance, we got critiqued for finally "talking like lawyers." Apparently, the reasonable Cardozo student is expected to know the practical difference between legalese and "lawyerlike noises." While one unnecessarily complicates, the other couches after years of training into clear and concise.

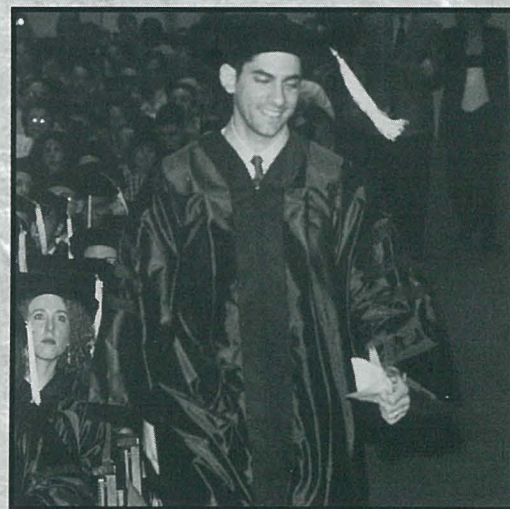
That's our mission - the Reasonable Cardozo Grad standard, if you will - Become proficient enough to explain things to clients in ways they understand while simultaneously integrating client needs and expectations. Use our analytical skills which we have developed here at Cardozo to look at things from all angles and determine what the most rational, prudent strategy would be to solve the matters at hand.

SO, when & if we finally meet Reasonable Man - so long as we live up to our standard, we can be confident that we've lived up to his.

To my friends, colleagues -- Good luck on the bar.

Keep it real & keep in touch. Thank you.

Jonathan Schloss



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