

Lou Brown: Preventive law and world harmony

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By awarding the *Pacem in Terris* Medal to Louis M. Brown, Manhattan College recognized his contributions to society. Professor Brown deeply loves the legal profession and his accomplishments in this field are legendary.

Yet, the driving force behind all of Professor Brown's work has been his devotion to humankind. In his autobiography, *Lawyering Through Life* (Rothman, 1986), he says it best:

The relevance of the individual person comes out whenever I am sincerely asked, mostly by lawyers and law students, to try to explain my interest in preventive law. The inquiry is often made in the context of a discussion of lawyering functions to achieve the objectives of preventive law. On the surface, it appears that my purpose may be to indulge the profession. Not so. My striving concerns people, individuals. It concerns a distaste of trouble, especially preventable trouble. It concerns a desire to improve a lot of people. It concerns a desire to afford each person the opportunities society permits. These I translate to mean an effort to strive for human happiness.

In a sense it is not the legal profession that draws my first attention. But strive as I would to accomplish the human goals of respect for the individual and of affirmative well being, I have come to believe that in matters where law is, or may be involved, people need the help of lawyers, whose purpose should be to seek to assist the individual achieve desired objectives in appropriate ways . . .

Preventive law is the outlet of life's purpose. The object is to help people in the way I know through a profession of learning that I have studied and experienced. It should be clear that I care more, much more, for the people that the profession is here to serve than I do for the profession itself. Yet I believe the help the profession can supply gives the profession a basis for its existence in our complex society.

These words reflect the clear purpose underlying his life's work. Brown continues to contribute with a staggering level of output, a brilliant level of quality, and an unwavering commitment of compassion, intellectual and moral integrity, and constant focus on his lifelong priorities. Brown's unique ability to see and utilize "the obvious" to better the world is demonstrated in his remarks upon acceptance of the *Pacem in Terris* Medal, which call for the need to study and pursue harmonious relationships.

At 83, Brown again is breaking new ground and lights the path for the rest of us. While writing, teaching and practicing prevention of legal trouble and even promoting the awareness of legal "wellness," aside from his harmony with the viola, Brown had not consciously focused his attention on the study and replication of harmonious relationships.

However, this attention to harmony is a logical and compelling complement to his prior work. As he has so many times pointed out, legal education dwells on problems, not on solutions or problem prevention. In the same vein, legal education looks at relationships that are conflictual and nonharmonious. Those are the relationships that end up in court. As he says so often, the legal transactions that work well do so in the privacy of a law office or, in fact, never even reach that stage.

In other academic fields, education focuses on "positive modeling." Religion is the most obvious example. We teach the Ten Commandments which primarily discuss positive tenets for behavior with a sprinkling of "shall nots." Biblical and religious figures offer personal characteristics and a code of conduct to be studied, learned and hopefully followed rather than negative examples to be avoided.

In the area of psychotherapy, positive modeling and the transference with the replicable attributes of the therapist are paramount to effective treatment and in improving mental and emotional health of patients. "The presenting problem" is used as a platform for "understanding the present, and planning a treatment and behavioral change for the future.

Similarly, the study of history applies the understanding of both positive and negative incidents of the past to chart a more positive future course. Only the most myopic history teacher would have students obsessively learn dates, places and names of battles as opposed to concentrating on cause-and-effect historical themes to understand the present and plan for the future.

In law practice, every day there are examples of harmonious relationships that can be emulated by students of a

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GUEST EDITORIAL *continued*

non-adversarial and nonconflictual approach to law practice. Some examples:

- Being vigilant to how “opposing” counsel can assist in searching for a solution that best meets underlying interests of all interested parties.
- Using “the presenting problem” that brings a client into contact with the lawyer to give the client an intrinsic sense of being valued as a person.
- Pointing out the possible opportunities available to a client seeking a divorce and in a life after separation to help the client improve and enjoy life.
- Using law office and law office staff as a “modeling ground” for improving harmony and collaboration in relationships with other people. The way a lawyer treats one’s secretary and colleagues is not lost on clients.
- Integrating one’s professional role and personal values

and attitudes towards conflict resolution and peace.

Brown is known for his humility and promotion of ideas—and reluctance to talk about himself. Yet, it is ironic that a study of the way that Louis Brown lives his life best exemplifies a model of establishing, maintaining and nurturing harmonious relationships.

Always available and interested, Brown is indefatigable in supplying ideas, support and connections to necessary resources and helpful relationships. No letter goes unanswered; no telephone call unreturned. His generosity in time, energy and financial support have benefitted countless institutions and dedicated individuals.

Throughout his endeavors, Professor Brown handles adversity and potential conflict with honesty, directness, grace, flexibility, creativity and a search for collaborative principled resolution. □
