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A GOOD LAWYER AND A GOOD PERSON

JAMES MOLITERNO

John Levy and I have been teaching and writing together for fourteen years now. For me, those years have been much richer, more rewarding, more meaningful, and happier, because of John's partnership in them.

John and I teach and write about lawyers, their ethics and practices, their culture. One of the classic questions asked by people who teach and write about lawyers is this one: "Can one be both a good lawyer and a good person?" Scholars' attempts to answer this question fill many volumes. I was not sure of my own answer to this question until I met and worked with John. Knowing John allows me to know the answer: One can be a good lawyer and a good person. John is both. I know that and so do the thousands of students he has taught. John teaches in all the usual ways, but he also teaches in a way that few can—he teaches by providing a simple, unassuming example of a good way of living life.

John is a teacher, and that, by the way, is how John describes his work. When asked what he does, John says, "I teach at the law school." He doesn't say, "I am a law professor," or "I am a professor at the law school." John teaches at the law school. He teaches every day, explicitly and implicitly. He teaches his students and he teaches his colleagues. He teaches all of us what a life of integrity, honor, simplicity, good nature, and kindness looks like. He taught me many more things, one of which was that one can indeed be a good person and a good lawyer.

The classic question is always framed "Can one be a good lawyer and a good person?" John is more than that. John is an excellent lawyer and a remarkable person. His lifetime of work in establishing and leading legal aid programs in Virginia has brought counsel and comfort and help to literally millions of people in need. His lifetime of work teaching law students at William and Mary has influenced the course of many thousands of lawyers whose work has

affected many more millions. He has done this lifetime of impressive work in the most selfless manner, never drawing attention to his accomplishments, never accepting as much credit as he deserves.

John has meant so much to the Law School. I won't recount here all of the multitude of contributions he has made; I'll leave that daunting task to others. But working with John on all manner of committees and projects, I know that John has always been a calming presence, an even-handed voice of sense and reason, taking positions utterly devoid of self-interest, arguing for his views gently and considerately. Law school faculties and communities need such members, and everyone here knows that John has been just such a person.

John and I both believe, in the best Aristotelian tradition, that people become better people, more virtuous people, by working with other good people on projects of consequence. Through this device, through the privilege of having worked with John, I am a better person today than I was when I met John. I know that John has had a similarly positive effect on colleagues and on a remarkable number of students. As trite as it may sound, it is absolutely true to say that John Levy has made many people better than they were before they met and worked with him.

Of course I am grateful to John for demonstrating to me, by the way he leads his life, that one can be a good lawyer and a good person. Far more important than showing that to me, John has shown that to thousands of William and Mary law students. Without John's presence, they might well have gone away from this place not knowing the answer to this critical question. With John's presence, they have left the law school with a sure example of the answer, an answer that no doubt has inspired many to be better lawyers and better people than they would have been without John's calming, steadying, inspiring presence. From all of them, from all of the people they have served, and from me . . . thank you, John.