

A Nostalgic Touch

Modesty, Humility, and What We Can Learn from Our Senior Attorneys

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Jim Collins, in his best-selling book, “Good to Great,” identifies leadership styles that typify the most successful corporate leaders in America. One trait that Collins describes caught some off-guard – humility. Collins wrote that the most effective leaders had personal qualities described as “modest, shy, quiet, self-effacing, understated, and humbled.”

Collin’s finding was shared by another well-known expert on leadership – Bill Taylor. Taylor wrote, “Practically Radical: Not So Crazy Ways To Transform Your Company, Shake Up Your Industry, and Challenge Yourself.” Taylor profiled an IBM executive who used the term “hum-bitious” to describe her style – a blend of humility and ambition.

While Collins’ and Taylor’s work is drawn from the business world, their findings are nevertheless instructive for our profession.

There can be little doubt that the most successful lawyers share those same qualities. Whether it’s building a law firm, working to make the profession better, winning clients, or gaining the trust of a jury, all of us are attracted to those personalities who deflect credit and share successes with other team members.

Humility is found in our military veterans. Tom Brokaw’s book, “The Greatest Generation,” describes how this generation felt they were not owed anything for their contributions. And they made the most of what little they had. In my own fact gathering with our KBA veterans, I was reminded of this trait – my question – “are you a veteran, and if so, explain” typically earned a brief reply – “Yes. Navy. Injured, POW.” A more extensive follow-up would reveal significant military service, distinctions, awards. Another example – when pressed for photographs of their service – many had none. Those who eventually found a photograph – it was not something taken at a photo studio. Getting a glamour shot while posing in uniform wasn’t a priority. Beating the Nazis? Uh, yes.

Last month the Wichita Bar Association members had the occasion to see first-hand all these truisms. With the assistance of Wichita attorney Jennifer Magana and Karin Kirk, executive director of the WBA, the bar scheduled a luncheon to honor those living veterans who were able to attend.

And on Tuesday, April 10 it happened.

The honorees were 14 attorneys and one spouse: Russel N. Barrett, Vincent L. Bogart, Aubrey J. Bradley Jr., Ralph R. Brock, Donald B. Clark, Bruce Fitts, Wilbur D. Geeding, Jack Glaves, J. Francis Hesse, Albert L. Kamas, Ernest McRae, Arnold C. Nye, Richard Render, and Hon. Keith Sanborn and his wife, Wanda.

These men included some who joined the services as young as 17 (Arnold Nye), were awarded the Purple Heart (Aubrey Bradley and Francis Hesse), were one of the first Americans to Hiroshima after the atomic bomb (Bruce Fitts). Others were interrogated as a prisoner of war (Bradley and Hesse). Al Kamas went to Iwo Jima with the Marines, and Ernest McRae piloted B-24s in the South Pacific. Rick Render was a POW at Nuremberg, and Keith Sanborn served in the Navy

where he met his wife, who was also at the Navy base.

At the conclusion of the luncheon we asked them – how did your military experience help make you a better attorney? The responses were insightful and inspirational – and all had one thing in common – diminishing what they did for our country.

“This was a one-of-a-kind program that our members treasured. We were humbled, and honored, and awed by their presence. I think we all hung on every word these men spoke. I keep thinking ‘what if we had never had this event?’ We would have never known these stories,” said Jennifer Magana. WBA Executive Director Karin Kirk added this: “The WBA was thrilled and honored to be able to identify 15 World War II veterans within our legal community and to have 11 of them as our guests at the luncheon on April 10. Over 125 attorneys attended and joined in recognizing the veterans for their service and thanking them for their sacrifices. We owe all of our veterans a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid.”

Indeed. ■

About the Author

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Front row (l-r): Hon. Keith Sanborn, J. Francis Hesse, Bruce Fitts, and Wilbur Geeding. Back row (l-r): Wanda Sanborn, Albert Kamas, Ralph Brock, Donald Clark, Aubrey Bradley, Arnold Nye, and Jack Glaves.