

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 162, No. 80

Serving Chicago's legal community for 161 years

What Would Leonard Say? Leonard Ring's Legacy After 22 Years

By Thomas A. Demetrio and Edward G. Willer
Corboy & Demetrio

Law Day provides us the perfect opportunity to reflect upon our own professionalism in our interactions with clients, opponents, the judiciary, and members of the public.

It is a time to reassess our commitment to our profession and to our community at large. Part of this self-reassessment should include how each of us would like to be remembered. Will we even be remembered? If so, why? Did we serve the legal profession with integrity and leave it better than when we entered it? Were we honest in dealing with our clients, our opponents, and the court system?

Our long-time pal, Judge Abraham Lincoln Marovitz, admonished us all to "never forget to remember." So, on the occasion of Law Day 2016, "remember" we will. We remember, with fondness, the legacy of Leonard M. Ring, a renowned Chicago trial lawyer who practiced law from 1949 until his sudden death in 1994.

Was he truly a great lawyer? You bet.

Leonard was a lawyer's lawyer. Lawyers and judges respected him and retained him, knowing he was what all lawyers aspire to be: the compleat lawyer.

In 1965, Leonard was the advocate and legal genius behind our state's Supreme Court adopting the theory of strict liability in tort. (*Suvada v. White*) In 1972, he successfully persuaded our Supreme Court to find unconstitutional the recently enacted "no fault" bill. (*Grace v. Howlett*) In 1992, when the 700-member Illinois Judges Association sued the state in a constitutional challenge involving the diminution of judicial salaries, it turned to Leonard. In addition to his success with juries, Leonard was Of Counsel in over 183 appellate and state Supreme Court cases.

Yes, Leonard's career was, indeed, stellar. Notably, he was:

- President of the Association of Trial Lawyers of America;
- A Founder and President of the Illinois Trial Lawyers Association;
- President of the Illinois Appellate Lawyers Association;
- Chairman of the Tort Section of the ABA;

and an elected member of:

- The American College of Trial Lawyers;
- The International Academy of Trial Lawyers;
- The International Society of Barristers; and
- The Inner Circle of Advocates.

In addition, had death not intervened, he was slated to become the 119th President of the Chicago Bar Association in 1995. In 1995, ATLA aptly renamed its Champions of Justice Award — which Leonard received in 1991 — to the Leonard M. Ring Champions of Justice Award.

Leonard wore the mantle of his success with humility. He never boasted. He never embellished. Leonard was truly self-deprecating. He was not concerned with impressing other people. He never flaunted his accomplishments. He was never envious. He was never jealous of other lawyers' accomplishments. When peers would attain a terrific verdict, Leonard was the first to pick up the phone to offer a sincere congratulations. Judges and defense lawyers not only respected him, they — like us — loved and trusted him.

Question: What precipitates our reflections on this sage, noble, honorable lawyer and bar leader now?

Answer: The recent proliferation of greed, fraudulent conduct, and blatant spurning of the rules that govern our professional conduct.

Leonard wouldn't like it at all. He would say: "STOP it." And we would take heed.

Exercising good judgment in conducting his professional business was of paramount importance to Leonard. He always conducted himself with a high degree of honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness in all of his professional endeavors. He engendered respect for the law, the profession, and himself.

On Law Day 2016, let us ask ourselves:

Are we forthright and honest in dealing with our clients, our opponents, and the Courts?

Are we trustworthy?

Do we diligently conduct ourselves with respect for others and in accordance with the Illinois Rules of Professional Conduct?

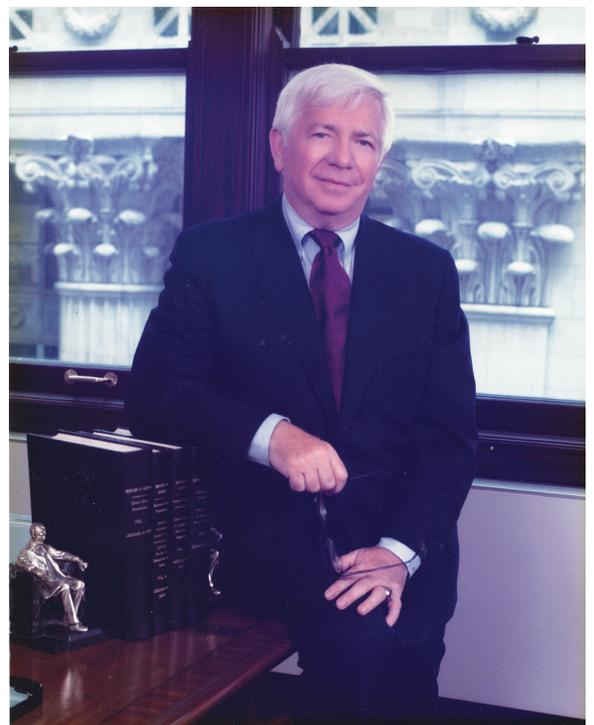
If we can answer these questions in the affirmative, we will keep alive the legacy of Leonard M. Ring. He'd like that.

Thomas A. Demetrio, a Founder of Corboy & Demetrio, in addition to working with Leonard on many legal matters, served for 17 years with him on the Supreme Court Committee on Illinois Civil Pattern Jury Instructions. He can be reached at TAD@CorboyDemetrio.com.

Edward G. Willer practiced law with Leonard Ring for over 20 years and, upon Leonard's death, joined the Corboy & Demetrio firm, where he continues to keep alive the spirit of Leonard. He can be reached at EGW@CorboyDemetrio.com.



From left: Tom Demetrio, Leonard Ring and Phil Corboy



Leonard M. Ring