

W.J. PERLSTEIN SPEECH

Judges, fellows and friends, we're here today to honor Bill Perlstein, the recipient of this year's Distinguished Service Award. Bill richly deserves this award, as every College Leader in the past thirty years knows. He served as the College's long-serving wise, practical, sensible general counsel from 2005 through 2017.

Bill and I met thirty-five years ago on opposite sides of an ugly case. Bill was representing an earlier recipient of the College's Distinguished Service Award and his law firm. His professionalism and civility throughout that case left me with a very positive impression. That this excellent firm chose Bill as its counsel tells you much about the man: he was and is, both literally and figuratively, a lawyer's lawyer.

Bill's resume strengths are extraordinary – summa cum laude college graduate; managing editor of the Yale Law Journal; distinguished judicial clerkship; and long-serving managing partner of one of the nation's foremost law firms; just to name a few. Bill is a giver, generous with his time. In addition to the College, Bill serves as trustee and board general counsel of his alma mater, Union College. His other public service leadership roles include membership on the board of directors of DC Neighborhood Legal Services and a life membership in the prestigious American Law Institute. But beyond that stellar resume, it is some of Bill's other character traits that I want to focus on today: his empathy, humility and perspective.

Let's start with Bill's empathy, his ability to share another's feelings. I vividly remember a long car trip we shared to the airport from Spartanburg, South Carolina in July, 1987 after a court hearing in our ugly case. During argument, I had to be careful in defending my client without besmirching the reputation of Bill's client. But picture this: a two-hour car trip with your potential adversary after that delicate hearing. In a non-stop dialogue during that trip, Bill and I probably exchanged about fifty jokes, none of which can be repeated here. Most important, with his humor, Bill showed his empathetic humanity and decency during those two hours, signaling that I had avoided a disaster.

A former law partner of Bill also described Bill's empathy. As an inexperienced first-year associate he had worked with Bill, who was the lead partner on a large reorganization case. The junior lawyer worried that he could do nothing right on even the simplest task. Bill never scolded him, instead praising the young associate to the client for the associate's brilliant strategic input. Bill had the innate sense that his associate would benefit more from encouragement than criticism.

A past chair of the College described Bill's humility and perspective. As he put it, Bill was always easy to work with and unpretentious, giving good advice in an unassuming manner. Bill's common sense, perspective and judgment, said the past chair, quickly surfaced when the College had to move its induction ceremony venue to our current location. Bill knew not only what the College needed (more space and better acoustics), but also what was appropriate for this diverse group (dignity, aesthetics).

Bill also had refreshing perspective when dealing with College affairs. With his understated humor, Bill always counseled us not to take ourselves too seriously. When we worried, for example, about whether the College's filing an amicus brief in the US Supreme Court would offend somebody, Bill reminded us that advocating for a sound, sensible position

was what truly mattered. We were sailing in a tiny ship on a boundless sea and Bill provided a steady hand on the wheel.

Bill was the steady, rock-solid, go-to guy for the College's leadership over a twelve-year period. It's no accident that the partners of his law firm elected him not only to its management committee but also as its managing partner. Good advice and direction, delivered with patience and caring, is truly a precious gift.

Bill has always been one of the College's most valuable assets. As our general counsel, he graced us with his modesty, kindness, generosity, common sense and wisdom. He has been not only a wonderful colleague, but also our good friend. We are delighted to recognize him today for his distinguished public service and for his making our world a better place by his strong presence. The College is one more happy client grateful for Bill's huge contributions. Bill remains the man to see.

Congratulations, Bill. Thanks for all that you do.

Mike Cook