

Quality of Justice

A message from the MSBA Student and Professionalism Committees

There are five core values in the legal profession: 1) Respect and Fairness; 2) Public Service; 3) Honesty, Integrity and Trustworthiness; 4) Competent, Prompt, and Diligent Representation; and 5) Quality of Justice. This piece addresses the quality of justice in our legal system.

Core Value: Responsibility for the Quality of Justice

The first sentence of the Preamble to the **Minnesota Rules of Professional Conduct** states that: “[a] lawyer is a representative of clients, an officer of the legal system and a public citizen *having special responsibility for the quality of justice.*”

The Preamble continues, “A lawyer should **demonstrate respect for the legal system** and for those who serve it, including judges, other lawyers and public officials. While it is a lawyer's duty, when necessary, to challenge the rectitude of official action, it is also a lawyer's duty to uphold legal process.”

“As a public citizen, a lawyer should **seek improvement of the law, the administration of justice and the quality of service rendered by the legal profession.** As a member of a learned profession, a lawyer should **cultivate knowledge of the law** beyond its use for clients, employ that knowledge in **reform of the law and work to strengthen legal education.** A lawyer should **be mindful of deficiencies** in the administration of justice and of the fact that the poor and sometimes persons who are not poor, cannot afford adequate legal assistance, and should therefore devote professional time and civic influence on their behalf. A lawyer should aid the legal profession in pursuing these objectives and should help the bar regulate itself in the public interest.”

"Though force can protect in emergency, only justice, fairness, consideration and cooperation can finally lead men to the dawn of eternal peace."

Dwight David Eisenhower

What does this mean for me?

Maintaining this value means that you:

- **Actively participate in the legal community.** Seek out ways to improve the law and the legal system by joining and participating in Bar activities and events. Offer your expertise and contribute the skills you are learning to improve justice issues in your community. Find ways to get involved.
- **Consider the public policy when evaluating case decisions.** Public policy arguments are often an expression of the need for justice to be done. These are ways in which lawyers help steer the law in the direction it should go.
- **Understand the legal process.** The public's faith in the justice of the legal process depends upon having a voice in the process.
- **Treat others with fairness and respect.** Recognize that we all contribute differently to a common goal. Make your goal the improvement of the common good.

Examples In Action

A *non-lawyer*, by the name of Clarence Earl Gideon – working pro se – petitioned the Supreme Court to ensure that a person charged with a crime, for which his freedom could be taken away, was entitled to the assistance of an attorney.

Today, law students across the United States assist inmates on death row with appeals through organizations such as the Innocence Project.

Law Students participating in national and local Bar Associations are partnering to improve the law and strengthen legal education. This series of letters on professionalism was developed for you by law students.