

Randy Butler – Attorney Professionalism Award

Garland R. Walker Inn of Court – May 10, 2011

I am pleased to be here tonight to present the Attorney Professionalism Award to Randy Butler. I first met Randy some 30 years ago when we were neighbors. Be careful where you buy a house – your old neighbors could come back to haunt you.

Until I was asked to present Randy's award I was only vaguely aware of the Garland R. Walker Inn of Court, but I now know a good deal about your organization and I applaud your effort to support and encourage professionalism.

Several months ago in a letter to *The Houston Lawyer*, speaking of Charles Foster and the film *Mao's Last Dancer*, I wrote about professionalism. Those thoughts have particular application to Randy Butler and his award tonight. Only a lawyer would quote himself, but this is what I wrote – "The practice of law is an art. Attempts to describe professionalism in the practice of law are difficult because we are trying to describe an art form. It's often easier to identify professionalism when we see it than it is to describe it in words." And then I wrote "Sometimes other lawyers are the best teachers of professionalism. There are still some giants in the land. Look around."

Look around, indeed. Looking around for professionalism is what this Inn of Court is all about. Look no further than Randy Butler.

Randy graduated from HBU, started seminary, transferred to and graduated from law school at U of H, clerked for the 14th Court of Appeals, joined F & J, where he was elected as a partner, then flipped to the other side of the docket and became a plaintiffs' lawyer, until he decided to move back to the middle and become a mediator. Every day Kathy wondered "What kind of lawyer will Randy be today?"

Randy has studied mediation at Harvard, read all the dispute resolution literature, and conducted hundreds of mediations, but in his current work he has circled back to his seminary training. Randy has taken up a calling that goes deeper than merely reaching a settlement – his work now seeks to reconcile the parties. To accomplish his work he created the Institute for Sustainable Peace.

So he gave up his law practice to form the Institute - a charitable organization that has a mission of making peace among people who hate each other. If that isn't enough, he then trains them to work together and mentors them to serve their communities. As I thought about this I decided that his work is not that different from yours, particularly those of you who sit on the bench and try to ride herd on trial lawyers.

Randy teaches that most conflicts are rooted in oppression of the weak, exploitation of the poor, and absence of the rule of law. He believes that sustainable peace must be founded on justice. You can't do it by holding hands and smiling. The Institute's current focus is on the Balkans and Sudan. If you think your opposing counsel or the lawyers in your court are unreasonable, how about dealing with people who have absolute hatred for each other, or who fight civil wars, or who practice genocide. Oh, you've had some of them.

Well, Randy uses collaboration rather than conflict to motivate change in the social fabric of communities. The Institute even goes so far as to try to transform conflict into peace, not just for a day, but into peace that is sustainable.

Randy and the Institute are performing admirable work, but the central reason this Inn of Court is presenting this professionalism award to Randy is because he is an example of professionalism. He looks, talks, writes, and acts like a professional. Instead of coming with a negative, hostile, angry, resentful, and overly aggressive approach, Randy brings a positive, cheerful, level-headed, reasonable, optimistic approach as a mediator of issues and a reconciler of people. In effect, Randy encourages each participant to step up to Randy's level – problem solving with a professional approach. Randy brings a commitment that addresses concerns beyond the immediate dispute, even beyond the immediate parties, and in the process he addresses the public good.

Randy, like the other honorees tonight, displays professionalism. And knowing Randy as I do, I expect that although he is pleased to receive this award and he is grateful for the recognition that it brings to the work of the Institute, he is also probably a little embarrassed. For he has never sought personal recognition. He merely seeks to be of service and to do his job. He seeks to promote the work of the Institute, not Randy Butler. His lack of self promotion is another example of his professionalism. Randy really has no choice but to do his work in a professional manner because that is who he is. Exemplary of what this award is all about, Randy Butler is stamped with the mark of a true professional.

In years past I have served as a director of the Houston Bar Association and as chairman of the Bar Foundation. I have come in contact with a lot of lawyers. Let me congratulate you, Inn of Court - you have made a wise selection in Randy Butler.

So Randy, for these reasons and more, it is my pleasure to present you with the Garland R. Walker American Inn of Court Attorney Professionalism Award for 2011.

John Rhem