

I have held various positions throughout my life. I have been an intern, sales associate, student assistant, and Program Coordinator. Out of all of the positions that I have had, the feedback I have received most consistently is that I am very professional. I have always taken pride in that and try to live up to that expectation in everything that I do. To me, being professional is one of the most important qualities a person can have, especially in an occupational setting or leadership role. At the time, I thought being professional meant nothing more than being polite, competent, diligent, and dependable because those were the qualities I exhibited in every position that I had. As a law student, I now know that professionalism means those things, and so much more. Google defines professionalism as “the competence or skill expected of a professional.” It also defines it as “the conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or a professional person.” This broad definition seemingly allows different professions to define what professionalism means in their particular fields and to create their own standards to abide by. As it turns out, the legal community does exactly that.

I had never thought twice about what professionalism actually meant until I entered law school. I realized just how serious it was when my colleagues and I took an oath of professionalism before classes commenced. It mentioned words like integrity, honesty, and respect. I quickly learned that the legal profession holds members of the legal community to incredibly high standards. I recently completed Professional Responsibility, where we analyzed the Model Rules of Professional Conduct, considered ethical problems we may encounter in the practice of law, the legal constraints on a lawyer’s professional conduct, the role of the lawyer in the legal profession and the place of the profession in society. We also briefly discussed the Model Code of Judicial Conduct. Being required to pass this class and the Multistate Professional Responsibility Exam demonstrates just how serious the legal profession is about living up to its high ideals and upholding these standards.

As a young lawyer in training, I am still learning what professionalism means as it relates to the practice of law. It is not only about the character and fitness of a person, but also their ethical behavior. It is about the choices we make as law students, attorneys, and judges when we are faced with a difficult situation, and knowing right from wrong. Professionalism means being an attorney 24/7 and in compliance with ethical rules at all times, even at the bar. Professionalism means treating others with civility, including opposing counsel and difficult clients. Professionalism means being a zealous advocate and diligently working on your client’s case, even if it is pro bono. These rules are in place to protect everyone involved including clients, third parties, attorneys, judges, and the legal profession as a whole. Thankfully, we have not only the rules, but our colleagues to help guide us when we need to be reminded.

In a world where so many view lawyers as liars and the justice system as corrupt, it is of the utmost importance to uphold these standards of professionalism at all times and demonstrate the contrary. Unfortunately, there are some unethical lawyers that perpetuate this stereotype. But as members of the legal community, it is our duty to encourage respect for the law and overcome the negative stigma associated with being a lawyer. What people do not know or see are the years of training, extensive background checks, written and oral examinations, continuing education credits, certifications, and other requirements an attorney must have to practice law. In addition, attorneys and judges must abide by strict rules of professional conduct that govern their

ethical and professional responsibilities. These requirements and limitations help safeguard the legal field. The practice of law is a noble profession and truly one to be revered.

The establishment of the American Inns of Court is significant to the legal profession. As an association that promotes the highest levels of civility, professionalism, and ethical behavior for lawyers, it is yet another way to emphasize the importance of professionalism in the legal field and hold professionals accountable. The rules of professional conduct are only a baseline for how attorneys and judges should conduct themselves. This organization encourages professionals to strive for excellence in the legal community.

Professionalism is a mentality, behavior, and a lifelong dedication to ensure the ethical and professional practice of law.