

A swallow had built her nest under the eaves of a Court of Justice. Before her young ones could fly, a serpent gliding out of his hole ate them all up. When the poor bird returned to her nest and found it empty, she began a pitiable wailing. A neighbor suggested, by way of comfort, that she was not the first bird who had lost her young. "True," she replied, "but it is not only my little ones that I mourn but that I should have been wronged in that very place where the injured fly for justice".

- Aesop's Fables

That swallow's perspective on "the place where the injured fly for justice" will never be the same. One of the things I'd like to speak with you about today is the public's perception of the place where the injured fly for justice - our legal profession.

Dean Cornwell, President Passerini, Provost Lilquist, Members of the Board of Regents, and Board of Visitors, distinguished faculty, honored guests, family, friends and most importantly - graduates - welcome to the Seton Hall University School of Law Commencement Exercises for the Class of 2024!!!

This is a glorious day and indeed one you will remember for the rest of your lives. So take a moment and look around. Soak in this beautiful venue. Your dedication and commitment have lead you to this magnificent day! This was no easy task. It took a lot of hard work and, more significantly, a lot of sacrifice. Please give yourselves a round of applause. But the sacrifice was not yours alone. In life, we seldom achieve anything worth mentioning without the support and sacrifice of those who love us. So, please join me in a round of applause for the folks in the back of the room - the spouses and partners, the children, the family and friends whose selfless support helped make this day possible for you. Somewhere in this room, there is a mom or a dad who is beaming with extreme happiness, pride and joy, while also being on the verge of tears reflecting on how it was just yesterday that you were born, started kindergarten, graduated high school, learned to drive - it all happened so fast and - I see you mom, I see you dad. A special round of

applause for the parents - or those who stood in as parents. This day is as much yours as it is your graduate's.

Today I also have with me, my lovely wife, Michele Meyer-Shipp (Seton Hall Law Class of '95); My three sons - Miles, Marcus and Mason Shipp; as well as my Career Clerk, Frances Huskey (Seton Hall Law Class of 2000), my law clerk, Stephanie Hahn; my courtroom deputy, James Balfour; and the Deputy-in-Charge of our Trenton vicinage, Gina Hernandez Buckley. Please help me give them a warm Seton Hall Law welcome.

In addition to this being a special day for all of you, today is also a very special day for me - you see it's an anniversary of sorts. Exactly 30 years ago to the day, (June 4, 1994), I sat in your seat and graduated from this illustrious institution. I can't believe it has been 30 years. Here is a resounding truth that has been repeatedly reinforced for me over these past 30 years: Seton Hall Law School is one of the finest law schools in this country - period! Make no mistake, the education that you have received here is second to none. I spent the first part of my career competing in the job market with, clerking with, being associates with, and being adversaries against those from law schools all over the country. Each time I had to go toe to toe with any of them, I was always confident that I was well prepared. Seton Hall trained the intellectual fighter in me - I call it the Seton Hall Moxie. Over the past 17 years, I have hired 30 law clerks and over 200 interns from law schools all over the country, and I can say, without hesitating, that my Seton Hall clerks and interns rank as some of the best! Seton Hall trained the intellectual fighter in them, and Graduates — Seton Hall has also trained the intellectual fighter in you. Be excited and encouraged to walk into any situation with confidence in that Seton Hall Moxie!!

Today I want to speak with you about three things: the first two are about you, the last is about us.

I want to start by sharing a secret with all of you. Lean in - it's a secret: If you never want to work another day in your life, do what you love! When you are doing what you love, it will not even feel like work. I call it walking in your purpose!! I have a younger brother who played professional football in the NFL for eight years and he once said to me, "I can't believe I get paid for this. I would do this for free!" I echo his sentiment about my job on the bench - I love what I do and I know for sure that I am walking in my purpose. The difference is he had a 7-figure contract and I had a public servant's salary. You will know you are walking in your purpose when you are excited about each new day; when compensation is not the primary purpose for your engagement and also when no matter how tempting a competing offer, you are just not interested.

After I had been appointed as a US Magistrate Judge, I'm sitting in my chambers, minding my own business, doing the work for the people of the District of NJ - in comes my career clerk, Frances (Seton Hall Law Class of '00), and she says "Judge, Sony Pictures is on the line and they'd like to speak with you about becoming a TV Judge." Without flinching, I told her to tell them thanks but no thanks, I'm not interested. They called back the next day and said tell the judge it could be a very lucrative opportunity and they do all of the taping for the year in 30 days. Mhhmmmm. Interesting, tell them thanks, but I'm still not interested. Well then it became a classic case of a jilted ex-lover. The more I said I'm not interested in you, the more they said "We have to have you". By then, my clerks and interns were buzzing so I asked them how much do these tv judges make? To my surprise, I was told Judge Judy had made \$37M that year. What? I could use \$37 million dollars. So I spent the money in my head and after a couple rounds of meetings and interviews, I learned that I would have to step down from my appointment to shoot a pilot which may or may not be picked up and after all was said and done, not even the lure of fame and fortune could pull me away from the life I love.

The next year I'm sitting in my chambers, minding my own business, doing the work for the people of the District of NJ - in comes my career clerk, Frances (Seton Hall Law Class of '00), and she says "Judge, a partner from your old law firm is on the line and he wants to speak with you about coming back to the firm and becoming a partner in the NY office." This was and still is one of the largest and most prestigious firms in the world. Again, I spent the money in my head, but ultimately said I wasn't interested.

The following year I'm sitting in my chambers, minding my own business, doing the work for the people of the District of NJ - in comes my career clerk, Frances (Seton Hall Law Class of '00), and she says "Judge, Senator Lautenberg's office is on the phone and they want to speak with you about becoming a United States District Judge." Now that was a call I couldn't wait to take!! I became a United States District Judge in 2012 and I have been walking in my purpose since.

So how do you find your purpose? You start by understanding not only what motivates you, but more importantly, what inspires you. The terms motivation and inspiration are frequently used interchangeably, but they are distinct. Motivation typically comes from external factors. It's the promise of a bonus at work, the response to a personal trainer at the gym, or just a fear of failure. Motivation can be powerful in the short term, providing the energy needed to meet certain goals. However, it generally relies on external validation and will subside when those external incentives are gone.

On the other hand, inspiration is an internal force. It comes from within. It is sparked by our passions, values, and dreams. When we are inspired, we are driven by a deep sense of purpose and vision. Unlike motivation, inspiration is enduring. It's sustainable because it's rooted in our core values and beliefs. Inspiration doesn't rely on external rewards or pressures; instead, it taps into our innermost desires and aspirations. Motivation comes in waves, Inspiration can last a lifetime;

Motivation comes from the outside, Inspiration comes from the inside; Motivation pushes you, Inspiration pulls you; Motivation says “You can do it”, Inspiration says “You can’t stop me from doing it!”

In life, we need both motivation and inspiration. They are both valuable in their own right. Motivation can jumpstart action and help us meet goals in the short term. But it's inspiration that sustains us over the long haul. When we are inspired, we tap into a well of inner strength and resilience that can carry us through even the toughest times.

So, how do you find inspiration in your lives? You have to connect with your passions and purpose. Take time to genuinely reflect on what truly matters to you and what you want to contribute to the world. Remember what drove you to law school in the first place. Not one of you came here to be average; not one of you came here to be ordinary. So my first message to you today is to do what you love by finding your purpose. You find your purpose by understanding what motivates you and more importantly, what inspires you. Attending Seton Hall University School of Law MOTIVATED me to become an attorney; spending my time teaching the law to all of you, now that — Inspires me!! Seek out inspiration in your lives and let it be the guiding light that fuels your journey so that you are walking in your purpose.

My second message is while you are on your way to greatness, help someone along the way. Service to others is one of the HIGHEST callings. Utilizing your talents and skills in service to others may in fact help you discover your own purpose. I encourage each of you, (as do the Rules on Admission to Practice), to dedicate time to Pro Bono matters as a regular part of your practice - and even more, if possible, to do a stint in Public Service. You will be all the richer for having done so.

I also encourage you to provide service by getting involved in one or more of the many bar associations - the federal bar, the State bar and the many affinity bar associations all provide an opportunity for you to continue to serve others, while continuing to improve our profession.

But enough about you, let's talk about us. And by us, I mean the members of this thing we call the legal profession. Being an attorney in the State of New Jersey is an honor and a privilege that comes with a tremendous responsibility. It is imperative that you understand that courtesy, civility and professionalism are at all times required. As an attorney, you occupy a position of public trust. Unlike the business executive who serves a customer, your services will be rendered to a client – and the differences are these – First, your advisory communications are protected by the time-honored, attorney-client privilege; Next, you stand as a fiduciary to your client – so whether he is rich or poor, guilty or not guilty, whether you are retained or appointed by the court – you represent your client. But, at the same time, you are an officer of the Court. It requires that you represent your client – within – and NEVER outside of the law. The legal profession is not merely a job; in many ways, it is a calling—a calling to uphold justice, fairness, and the rule of law. You are the guardians of our legal system, entrusted with immense power. As you begin your legal careers, never lose sight of the values that brought you to this moment.

You are about to enter a noble profession. But there are those in the world who would have it looked upon as the “oldest profession”. In a world where truth is often obscured by misinformation, and where justice is sometimes overshadowed by injustice, your role as legal advocates today is even more crucial. I caution you today to be mindful of the public's perception of our profession. From even well before Shakespeare's cry to “kill all of the lawyers” in King Henry VI, society has looked skeptically upon lawyers. Maintaining the public's confidence becomes difficult when so much of our understanding of what “a good lawyer is” is based upon

the media and images largely created in Hollywood. Lawyers are routinely portrayed as slick, fast-talking, self-dealing, unethical and immoral characters. I've watched this inaccurate portrayal only become worse in this era of unrealistic reality tv. Even the storylines of some of the better legal dramas are ripped from actual headlines. I'm not sure if it is life imitating art, or art imitating life. If we pause to think about this phenomenon for a moment, though - what a frightening proposition! We have some of the brightest and most creative writers of all times, and what they have said is – we can't even make up storylines or plots as intriguing as reality. Unfortunately, all too many of those bad headlines involve lawyers. Add in the plethora of bad lawyer jokes and it becomes clear that we have our work cut out for us in repairing the public's perception of our profession.

So it is against this backdrop that I provide these words of advice as you begin your journey. We are all concerned about the increase in the number of attorney disciplinary cases. We are equally concerned about the political discourse in this country and how some have allowed politics to overshadow ethics. As you sit here today and vividly recall how much time, effort and sacrifice you've put into graduating from this prestigious institution, don't ever let anyone cause you to jeopardize all that you have worked for. Remember, unethical lawyers don't start out being unethical. They become unethical over time by stretching the truth and cutting corners. They also let others set their ethical parameters. If you let your clients or your law firm define "what is ethical" for you, then they will define ethical in a way that is in their best interests and not yours.

I also want to be candid with you, and say what you likely already know - The law is not perfect, and it never will be, for laws are made by individuals and institutions who themselves are not perfect. It is, however, the finest mechanism yet devised to achieve the ideal of justice. As you enter the profession, I hope you will reflect upon what the law means in our democratic

society. Without the law, democracy cannot survive. We live in a country where very little is universal – Unlike many countries, America doesn't have a singular religion, America doesn't have a singular ethnicity, Americans don't have a singular language, we have varying degrees of education, and many different likes and dislikes. The ONE universal thing that binds us all as Americans, is the rule of law! The public's perception and confidence in the integrity of our system is essential to our American society.

So, while society can vilify lawyers with bad jokes that mock our integrity and purpose, the reality is that the law is powerful. Without lawyers – without all of you – none of this would be possible. You are the individuals who, over the next half-century, will bear the profound responsibility of preserving, strengthening, and ensuring that our legal system continues to be the finest anywhere – where we all can be assured of equal justice under the law no matter our differences.

We may not be able to change Aesop's swallow's perspective on the place where the injured fly for justice, but we can very well make sure that those who come find the finest legal system anywhere. Congratulations Class of 2024! The world awaits your brilliance, your compassion and your commitment to justice. Go out and show them that Seton Hall Moxie. And, whatever your life's work, do it well!

Thank you!