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### Broward County Bar Association

1051 SE 3rd Avenue  
Fort Lauderdale, FL33316  
954.764.8040

## letter from the young lawyers' president



*Jeffrey M. Wank*

### Practicing with Professionalism

Opposing counsel was vicious. He was out for blood. Not only was his client extremely aggressive and interested in using every litigation tactic in the book, but counsel himself had a reputation for being an attack dog, known to not play by the rules (and not to play well with others). Opposing counsel was also rude, unpleasant, and outright unprofessional. It was the type of case where everything was followed up in writing.

Ever find yourself in a similar situation? A case which keeps you up at night questioning why you decided to swim in debt only to be abused by a colleague. You're not alone. Many young lawyers I speak with on a weekly basis bring up the topic of professionalism more than any other issue (aside from student loans and jobs). We constantly hear from more seasoned attorneys how important it is to treat our fellow lawyers and the judicial process with respect and honor. But why then do we routinely find ourselves wondering if everyone is playing by the same rules? Likewise, is it appropriate to defend yourself and engage in the unprofessional behavior if you are attacked?

I believe more and more young lawyers are not receiving the training and mentoring needed to fully develop their skills, both from a legal and professional perspective. One can look at the rise of newer attorneys in our state, or realize that many clients are not paying lawyers the way they used to pay, as a basis for this problem. This can be traced to the changes in the landscape of the practice of law, which has changed the economic dynamics and has arguably forced lawyers to do more with less, creating a more competitive and hostile profession. As such, finding a job with a law firm that provides a mentor or legal training has become a premium, and something I do not believe my peers should take for granted. Enhance, refine your career by connecting with a mentor via the BCBA Mentorship Program, and/or connect with other top-notch professional attorneys via the networks you develop at the BCBA. These will last you a lifetime and will guide you along the right path.

Many of the examples relating to unprofessional behavior can be linked to improper training and development. Certain lawyers' actions are not surprising once we learn the atmosphere in which they learn how to practice law. I urge all young lawyers not to engage in such rhetoric, and continue to take the high road when pressed by opposing counsel's unethical tactics. Such behavior will be noticed, for better or for worse. And should you find yourself in a firm which engages in such questionable practice, do not fall victim to unprofessional conduct which will follow you for the remainder of your long career.

Finally, if you are a witness to unprofessionalism, do not hesitate to educate your colleague and explain why his or her actions are damaging to our profession. Take the time to engage in a positive discussion, and perhaps you may not only help your opponent, but your client as well. **B**