

What every law student needs to excel as an attorney

Introducing the Fromm Six

BY WILLIAM HENDERSON

One of the greatest people in legal education whom you have likely never heard of is a man named Leonard Fromm. Fromm served as dean of students at Indiana University Maurer School of Law — Bloomington from 1982 to 2012. On Feb. 2, Fromm passed away after a relatively short battle with cancer.

I want to discuss an innovation Fromm contributed to legal education — a contribution that, I predict, will only grow over time. This innovation is a competency model for law students called the Fromm Six. But first, let me supply the essential background.

After several years in counseling and adult education, Fromm joined the law school in 1982 to preside over student affairs. During the course of three decades, he quietly became the heart and soul of Maurer School of Law. Fromm was typically the first law school person who students met during orientation, the voice that called out their names during commencement (with an amazing, booming tenor), and the law school administrator who completed character and fitness applications for state bar authorities.

During the three years in between, Fromm counseled students through virtually every human problem imaginable. His most difficult work was done in his office with his door closed and all his electronic devices turned off. It was

private work that was not likely to produce much fanfare.

While at Indiana, Fromm's title was expanded to include alumni affairs. The change did not expand his duties in any significant way — he was already working 70 hours a week in a job he loved. Rather, the change reflected the fact that Indiana alumni associated (and often credited) Fromm with the deepest and most abiding lessons of law schools: overcoming self-doubt, confronting self-destructive behavior, the importance of relationships, the courage to try something again after disappointing failure, or the ability to see the world through the eyes of your adversary or opponent.

One of the cumulative benefits of Fromm's job was the ability to track the full career arc of lawyers' careers, from the tentative awkwardness of the first year, to involvement in the school's extracurricular events and social scene, to coping strategies for students not at the top of their class, and the myriad unexpected turns in our graduates' professional careers.

During his tenure, he interacted with nearly 6,000 students and stayed in contact with a staggering number. Invariably, he would see a connection between law school and a student's subsequent success and happiness later in life (noting, as he would, that professional success and happiness are not necessarily the same thing).

In 2008, I started collaborating with Fromm on a project to construct a law school competency model. Our first iteration was a list of 23 success factors, which we constructed with the help of industrial and organizational psychologists. Although valid as a matter of social science, the list was too long and complex to get traction with students. In

2010, the faculty who teach Indiana 1L Legal Professions class got together and reduced the list of competencies to 15. And once again, we found it was too long and complex to execute in the classroom.

During the summer of 2011, as we were debriefing the challenges of another year in our competency-based 1L Legal Professions course, Fromm said, "I have an idea."

A short time later, he circulated a list of six competencies that were appropriate to 1Ls and foundational to their future growth as professionals. Alas, now we had a working tool! Moreover, none of the professors teaching the Legal Professions course, including myself, wanted to revise a single word — a veritable miracle in legal academia.

Upon reviewing the list, I kidded Fromm that the new IU competency model should be called the Fromm Six, which was a play on the famous Big Five personality model that forms the bedrock of scientific personality testing. (He had a Master's degree in counseling psychology as well as a law degree.) Fromm just laughed. But the Fromm Six had a lot of resonance with the rest of us. So the label stuck.

In May 2012, Fromm retired from his position as dean of students and alumni affairs. At the age of 70, he was getting ready to get into the classroom and join us in teaching the 1L Legal Professions course. This was to be in addition to his usual Negotiations class, where he was a master. Instead, within a few weeks of retirement, he was diagnosed with a virulent cancer that never let go.

None of us can make sense of Dean Fromm's death, as it abruptly ended a life of complete, unselfish service to a large community of students, faculty



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and graduates. But, as best as I can, I am inclined to pay tribute to his life. And to my mind, there is no greater tribute than to publish and publicize the Fromm Six so that another generation of lawyers can benefit from his wisdom, grace and kindness. Here are the Fromm Six:

1. SELF-AWARENESS – Having a highly developed sense of self. Being self-aware means knowing your values, goals, likes, dislikes, needs, drives, strengths and weaknesses, and their effects on your behavior. Possessing this competence means knowing accurately which emotions you are feeling and how to manage them toward effective performance and a healthy balance in your life. If self aware, you also will have a sense of perspective about yourself, seeking and learning from feedback and constructive criticism from others.

2. ACTIVE LISTENING – The ability to fully comprehend information presented by others through careful monitoring of spoken words and nonverbal cues. Although that seems obvious enough, the number of lawyers and law students who are poor listeners suggests the need for better development of this skill. This skill requires intense concentration and discipline. Smart technology devices have developed a very quick mode of “listening”

to others. Preoccupation with these devices makes it very challenging to give proper weight and attention to face-to-face interactions. Exhibiting weak listening skills with our colleagues/classmates/clients might also mean that they will not really get to the point of telling us what they really meant to say. Thus, we miss the import of what the message was to be.

3. QUESTIONING – The art and skill of knowing when and how to ask for information. Questions can be of various types, each type having different goals. Inquiries can be broad or narrow, nonleading to leading. They can follow a direct funnel or an inverted funnel approach. A questioner can probe to follow up primary questions and to remedy inadequate responses. Probes can range from encouraging more talk to asking for elaboration on a point to even being silent. Developing this skill also requires controlling one’s own need to talk and control the conversation.

4. EMPATHY – Sensing and perceiving what others are feeling, being able to take their perspectives, and cultivating a rapport and connection. To do the latter effectively, you must then communicate that understanding back to the other person by articulating accurately those feelings. That person then will know that you have

listened accurately, that you understand and that you care. Basic trust and respect can then ensue.

5. COMMUNICATING/PRESENTING –The ability to present compelling arguments assertively and respectfully and sell one’s ideas to others. It also means knowing how to speak clearly and with a style that promotes accurate and complete listening. As a professional,communicating means to persuade and influence effectively within an interaction without damaging the potential relationship. Being able to express strong feelings and emotions appropriately in a manner that does not derail the message is also important.

6. RESILIENCE – The ability to deal with difficult situations calmly and cope effectively with stress; to be capable of bouncing back from or adjusting to challenges and change; to be able to learn from your failures, rejections, feedback and criticism as well as disappointments beyond your control. Being resilient and stress-hardy also implies an optimistic and positive outlook, one that enables you to absorb the impact of the event, recover within a reasonable amount of time and to incorporate relevant lessons from the event.

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