

# Going To Hell In A Hand Basket

## *Is Law School Worth It?*

What with all the difficulties that graduates of law schools are having finding jobs, and the difficult economy, and the turmoil in the professions, a lot of people in the profession are raising the question of whether law school is worth it.

On the face of it, this seems to be a legitimate concern. Look how hard you have to work just to get into a decent law school. Look at the cost of it, and the massive student loan debt that can take decades to repay, saddling so many of today's graduates with near lifetime servitude to the debtors.

Then there are the questions being raised about the schools themselves. Are they being unfair by not telling law students the truth about the job market for lawyers? Are they teaching to the contemporary practice of law, and the modern law firm, or are they so rooted in anachronism that they don't know how to prepare a law student for the actual practice of law? Are today's law students really good enough to practice law, or have they been admitted just to fatten the schools' coffers? Is the profession currently in such flux that it creates confusion about its future - - to the extent that uncertainty on a massive scale prevails? Are the law schools and the profession trying to address symptoms rather than root causes? Good questions.

So many words on so complex a question -- and still no ultimate answer.

Obviously lawyers are important in our society, as are doctors, accountants and even policemen and plumbers. And obviously some of them are brilliant and some of them stupid and some of them are what the Greek philosophers called sophomoric -- wise fools. Dumb people can be educated and wise people may not be educated. And

so far, there's little evidence that any school -- law or accounting or basket weaving -- has been able to discern the difference with any certainty.

Then there's the fact that a law degree is or will ultimately be an advantage -- if not immediately in law then in some other pursuit. There is no absolute.

As for law schools, they are like many other professional schools -- lagging behind reality. And is anecdotal analysis really ever a solution?

During World War II the Army Air Force sent me to school to be a radio operator. The old fashioned straight key. No sooner did I get into the field when I discovered that radio operators laughed at straight keys -- they all used semi--automatic keys, and I had to have my family send one up to me in the Aleutians from New York. And that's a major problem for law schools, too. They are training for an economy and a society and a contemporary law practice that's long-since passed them by.

Unfortunately, law school is a gateway to a profession, and I doubt we're going to go back to reading law. I doubt we're going to modernize the profession in one fell swoop.

Is it frustrating? Yes. It could be argued that anybody who applies to law school should be smart enough to know what the current employment picture is at this time, and that mitigates the validity of complaining about it (but not much). Could law schools do a better job? Yes, but so, too, could the bar associations. But one of the first things my father, who had been a lawyer during the 1920s and 30s, tried to teach me was to be realistic. And while this discussion is valuable -- it is only to the degree that we are realistic about it, and not reside in what could or should be, but rather in what is. Then we might have a better idea of how to improve it.

We live in a dynamic world -- one in which understanding is often elusive -- or even lags behind change. The legal profession, as we've so often seen, is resistant to change -- which is why change is an evolutionary process, and rarely a singular flash of insight event.

But change is inevitable, as hard as it is for old-timers to accept. Just remember the traditionalists' reactions to *Bates* ("It will be the end of the legal profession"). But without understanding the anatomy of evolutionary change, it can become painful when it looms large.

In fact, the profession is sturdy, and like a sturdy boat in a heavy storm. Eventually, the weather changes, and the boat rights itself and sails on.

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