Dean's Desk: IU Maurer Professor's Legacy Lives on at Law School

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Two months ago, the Maurer School of Law lost an esteemed colleague, friend and teacher who touched the lives of more than 6,000 of our alumni during his 33 years at the law school.

Leonard Fromm, our beloved Associate Dean for Students and Alumni Affairs, passed away on Feb. 2. Tributes to Len have been pouring in from around the world, all of them attesting to his many qualities that served the school so well. Several alumni wrote of Len’s willingness to help them in times of personal and professional self-doubt and to guide them through the tentative awkwardness of the first year of law school.

One alumnus wrote, “Len Fromm represented all that was good about Indiana University and the Law School. He genuinely cared about the students and spent more time learning about each of their aspirations and dreams than anyone could have expected. He had a warm, thoughtful and caring manner that had a profound impact on me and other students throughout his years of service to the Law School and wider community.”

Len saw himself as very much in the background, working behind the scenes to counsel students privately. Yet his influence was — and remains — deeply felt. He knew each student by name, empathized with their individual predicaments, and kept in touch with a staggering number of them after they graduated and began their professional lives.

Len’s legacy lives on at the law school in many ways that will have a real impact on our students’ ability to succeed in the profession. Trained as a counselor — he held a Master’s Degree in Counseling Psychology as well as a law degree — he took a real interest in developing our students’ professional competencies. He was intimately involved in the design of Indiana Law’s innovative IL course on the legal profession, which uses legal ethics and the law of lawyering as the spine of a course that immerses students in a variety of practice settings. In so doing, the course helps students identify the competencies they must develop to succeed in their professional lives.

My colleague Bill Henderson, who directs our Center on the Global Legal Profession and who co-founded our legal profession course, recalled that Len was a master at taking complex social science principles and distilling them into practical teaching tools. “In 2008 I started collaborating with Len on a project to construct a Law School competency model,” Bill wrote in the March issue of The National Jurist. “Our first iteration was a list of 23 success factors. … Although valid as a model of social
science, the list was too long and complex to get traction with students. … During the summer of 2011, as we were debriefing the challenges of yet another year in the legal profession course, Len said ‘I have an idea.’

“A short time later,” Bill continued, “Len circulated a list of six competencies that were appropriate to 1Ls and foundational to their growth as professionals. At last, we had a working tool!” We named these traits the Fromm Six, humorously, at first, as a play on the famous Big Five model that forms the basis of scientific personality testing. But the name stuck.

In the National Jurist article, Bill wrote, “There is no greater tribute [to Len] than to publish and publicize the Fromm Six so that another generation of lawyers can benefit from his wisdom, grace, and kindness.” I couldn’t agree more, so I share them here:

**Self-awareness**: having a highly developed sense of self. 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.

**Active listening**: the ability to comprehend information fully through careful monitoring of spoken words and nonverbal cues. (Preoccupation with technology has made it very challenging to give proper weight and attention to face-to-face interactions.)

**Questioning**: the art and skill of knowing when and how to ask for information. Developing this skill also requires managing one’s own need to talk and control the conversation.

**Empathy**: sensing and perceiving what others are feeling, being able to take their perspectives, and cultivating a rapport and connection. This includes communicating understanding back to others by accurately articulating their feelings. (This is something Len was especially good at doing.)

**Communicating and presenting**: the ability to present compelling arguments assertively and respectfully, and sell one’s ideas to others. Being able to express strong feelings and emotions appropriately in a manner that does not derail the message is also important.

**Resilience**: the ability to deal with difficult situations calmly and cope effectively with stress; to be able to learn from your failures, rejections, feedback and criticism as well as from 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 incorporate relevant lessons from the event.

All of us miss Len’s guidance, wisdom and warmth, but rejoice in his legacy. We are planning a tribute to him on campus this fall.

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