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A DEAN OF CHARACTER

JOEL K. GOLDSTEIN*

Jeff Lewis's deanship will be remembered for the tangible contributions it made to the development of Saint Louis University School of Law (the School) and to the University of which it is an important part. The size of the faculty increased dramatically through entry-level and lateral hiring (the latter something rarely done before). More resources were made available to support faculty scholarly activities. The School intensified its commitment to clinical and practical skills training, the curriculum was expanded and arranged in a coherent manner to better prepare students for practice, and small-section classes were introduced. The School's program centers were given additional support, and new academic concentrations were created to respond to increased specialization in the legal profession. Study abroad programs were created, including the American Bar Association (ABA) approved Summer Law Program at the University's Madrid campus. In addition, the School made increased efforts to connect with alumni consistent with Dean Lewis's respect for the practice of law. The credentials of the incoming student body improved, bar passage rate increased, the number of faculty chairs tripled, and new scholarships were created. The School also began a capital campaign to finance a new building project—shortly before the economy tanked, unfortunately.

This partial list of advances may be attributed to Dean Lewis's knowledge of legal education, his deep appreciation of the best traditions of our Law School and his vision of what it could become, and his skill in discharging the many and various functions of a law school dean. He came to us with a national reputation as a leader in legal education, and for eleven years he deployed those assets to our benefit.

Those who were present both at his arrival and his retirement cannot help but appreciate the enormous transformation and progress made during his eleven-year stewardship of the School. The long-standing commitment to teaching remained the core institutional responsibility, and Dean Lewis's watch enhanced our ability to discharge that responsibility. Yet the School improved its scholarly footprint in a way that enhanced the value of the degree our students receive, while maintaining a devotion to service consistent with

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the concept that lawyers should be people for others. Make no mistake, his leadership was largely responsible for enhancing these three components—teaching, scholarship, and service—while preserving a balance among them.

Extraordinary though they were, Dean Lewis's palpable accomplishments during the last eleven years are not the focus of this tribute. Even they pale in comparison to the quality I most wish to salute, his character. His deanship provides a powerful reminder of the centrality to successful and enduring leadership, academic and otherwise, of certain ethical qualities. These attributes are typically taken for granted when present, yet their absence is ultimately lamented when disasters ensue.

It is always perilous to try to depict a person by spotlighting a few characteristics. The process of distillation often has a distorting effect, as the disaggregated elements never quite reflect the person from whom they are taken. But let me suggest four exemplary features of Jeff Lewis which are intrinsic to his character and fundamental to his success as Dean.

First, he is a person of the utmost integrity. He believes that honesty is the appropriate way to deal with others, and his behavior followed from that commitment. He was straightforward rather than strategic, or perhaps more accurately, his inherent strategy was to be candid—not coy. He treated his deanship as a fiduciary responsibility, and he invariably emphasized institutional rather than personal needs. Whereas many decanal candidates seek to negotiate a package of personal benefits, Jeff Lewis focused on obtaining resources to improve the School of Law. He did not ask for a chair or even a concluding sabbatical, standard components of decanal packages. He is not a self-dealer. His commitment was—and is—to the School. He did not value the deanship as a springboard to another position. His single professional aspiration was to develop our Law School, and he subordinated or aligned his ambitions with that objective.

Second, he is a person of genuine humility. Personal pronouns are among the underused words in his vocabulary, reserved for those occasions when they become necessary tools to express appreciation for someone else. Although Jeff identified his ambitions with the Law School, he did not claim the School's successes as his own. On the contrary, he allowed others to enjoy the spotlight and receive the credit for institutional accomplishments which he made possible. If others thought themselves entitled to the bouquets he generously cast their way, so be it. He recognized that he could get a lot more done if he didn't mind that others received credit for accomplishments he enabled. His innate modesty, rooted in a strong sense of personal security, became a leadership tool, an aspect of his hidden-hand leadership approach. It elevated him far above those who reflected the more common inclination to claim credit for their successes, and those of others.

Third, he treats other people as he would wish to be treated. His adherence to the Golden Rule reflects a human sensitivity which enables him to problem-

solve with others in a collegial manner. Jeff was not a “my way or the highway” leader. In part, that style is at odds with his personality and with his values. Yet, he also recognized that ultimately it was not a sustainable model of leadership. He tried to understand competing points of view and, where possible, find solutions that accommodated legitimate viewpoints and interests. There are many proper ways to get to most destinations, he thought. What was most important was generally not which path was followed, but getting to where you wanted to go in some appropriate fashion.

Finally, he practices what he preaches. Although some deans will teach an occasional seminar, Jeff insisted upon teaching a section of Evidence virtually every year since he joined as dean. Over time, he added another course, often Remedies, so that his teaching load as dean was only slightly less than that of most faculty members. Bearing that teaching load served multiple purposes. Yes, this former high school math teacher loves to teach, and his time in the classroom is for him (and from what one hears, for his students) a joyful experience. By bearing that load, he also helped the School meet its commitment to our students, and he stayed in touch with many of them. But teaching that package also sent a message to the faculty, more powerful than words could do, of the centrality of teaching to the School’s mission. And—of course—for Jeff, teaching is not simply showing up at the appointed hour and drawing from memories of classes taught in prior years. A visit to his office in the late afternoon would often find him reviewing yet again the familiar casebook pages which were the subject of the next day’s class.

It was no surprise that Jeff Lewis formed a mutual admiration society with that other great son of Ohio, Vince Immel, who for scores of his students will always, and properly, personify their Law School. They met over breakfast on Jeff’s first visit to our Law School, and their instant bond and Jeff’s sense of the way in which the Law School sought to reflect Vince’s qualities, was part of what drew him here. It was always a treat to observe them together, for they each delighted in the company of the other, in part because they each recognized the other as the real deal, though neither would have or needed to, make that claim for themselves.

These qualities—integrity, humility, human sensitivity, and modeling behavior—are, it seems to me, interrelated parts of the character of this very good and decent person, the common threads of a strong and vivid fabric. Yet these attributes are not simply intrinsic parts of Jeff Lewis’s character. They became tools of his leadership which, along with his knowledge and skill, enabled him to succeed so magnificently as our dean. In keeping with his character, his success became our success. Yet in ways unappreciated, it really was his success, and that success—his and ours—reminds us of the imperative of character in a leader.

