

Saint Louis University Law Journal

Volume 55
Number 1 *Tributes to Jeffrey E. Lewis, Dean
Emeritus and Professor of Law (Fall 2010)*

Article 3

2010

A Man with a Vision and the Skills to Make It Happen

Sandra H. Johnson
Saint Louis University School of Law, johnsosh@slu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.law.slu.edu/lj>



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sandra H. Johnson, *A Man with a Vision and the Skills to Make It Happen*, 55 St. Louis U. L.J. (2010).
Available at: <https://scholarship.law.slu.edu/lj/vol55/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Saint Louis University Law Journal by an authorized editor of Scholarship Commons. For more information, please contact [Susie Lee](#).

A MAN WITH A VISION AND THE SKILLS TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

SANDRA H. JOHNSON*

Saint Louis University School of Law (SLU Law) is both radically different and fundamentally the same as it was when Jeff Lewis became Dean in 1999. In fact, it is the seamlessness among past, present, and future that empowered Jeff's vision for the School of Law from the time he was a candidate for our deanship.

Jeff was an exceptional candidate for a law school deanship. He was already highly regarded nationally in the world of legal education as an experienced and thoughtful law dean based on his service as Dean of the University of Florida Levin College of Law. His years of leadership within the American Bar Association's standards and accreditation process gave him a rare insight into the contemporary landscape and the future of legal education. He had a special gift for clearly and passionately presenting a vision married to specific and achievable plans.

I remember Jeff as a candidate describing how legal education was changing and what SLU would be expected to do to continue to succeed: The "big box" form of legal education, where almost all courses were taught in groups of 50–100 students, was quickly giving way to first-year small sections; to expanding opportunities and increasing demand for more professional skills courses that provided students with generous feedback; to making clinical programs available to nearly all students; and to the increasing sophistication of legal research and writing courses. At the same time, the demand for support services for law students was beginning to mimic what had been available to these students in their undergraduate experiences, with more emphasis on academic and personal support from professional staff members. Law schools were also taking their place in academe generally, committing substantial resources to supporting faculty scholarship in terms of teaching loads, summer support, workshop series, travel, and so on.

Jeff intuitively gravitated toward the distinct mission of Saint Louis University. It was evident that his vision for legal education, his character, and SLU's mission were a good match. His enthusiasm for SLU's future was contagious, and his plans were detailed and incremental. Jeff gained the support of SLU's President, Father Lawrence Biondi, and began his work.

* Interim Dean and Professor Emerita, Saint Louis University School of Law.

Jeff was a builder for SLU Law, building a new infrastructure that bore little relationship to the old. Other tributes in this issue of the *Journal* detail some of that growth. Jeff's influence can be measured quantitatively: adding faculty; increasing faculty publications; improving bar exam outcomes; broadening student support services; making clinical and professional skills courses available to all students; enhancing fundraising and the Law School's recognition nationally; and so on. What cannot be measured as directly is that Jeff was able to lead the School of Law through this period of growth and change while staying true to its traditional mission.

The School of Law has always had a reputation for putting students at the center of its concerns. SLU was known as a place where teaching was valued, with faculty who were devoted to their teaching and cared for their students. Most SLU Law faculty were excellent teachers and some, like Professor Vincent Immel, were extraordinary. As I watched Jeff's plans unfold, from the vantage point of my position as University Provost, I admit that I was concerned that the traditional character of the School of Law as a place where students mattered most would be diminished. Throughout his term as Dean, however, he has preserved and encouraged this important tradition.

In fact, the core of Jeff's vision for the School of Law did revolve around students: providing them with more educational opportunities, more services, and the best faculty. In faculty hiring, the essential commitment of the school to teaching was apparent to faculty candidates, and the School was able to recruit outstanding scholar-teachers. The School has always been committed to service for and with the community. Jeff supported this part of the mission as well by expanding the clinic enormously, by providing funding for summer public interest internships for students, and by creating a position for the School's first pro bono service coordinator.

I have had the privilege of viewing Jeff's deanship from several perspectives. While I was Provost, when Jeff was selected as Dean and for the first three years of his deanship, I had confidence in him as a dean. I had confidence that he told me the truth: his word was like gold. I had confidence that he understood that if I had a problem, he had a problem. I had confidence that he viewed problems as challenges and always worked toward a solution.

When I returned to the law faculty in 2002, Jeff was my Dean. He made it clear that he was enthusiastic about my return to the faculty and made sure that I was integrated within the governance of the School of Law. It was then that I began to appreciate the warmth and personal support that is described in other essays in this issue.

Now, I am sitting in the Dean's seat as the search process for the new dean gets underway. Having served as Interim Dean twenty years ago, I have a great appreciation for the infrastructure that Jeff built for the School of Law. It enables us to do much more for our students, for our alumni, and for our community than was possible then.

We all owe a debt of gratitude to Dean Jeffrey Lewis for his contributions to Saint Louis University School of Law. He'll wave off the thank you, but we should extend it nonetheless.

