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A TRIBUTE TO DEAN JEFF LEWIS FROM SATISFIED CUSTOMERS

MICHAEL A. WOLFF*

A law school dean, if he were running a business, would have many kinds of customers. Faculty, students, alumni, the legal profession, judges—all are his customers. As a judge and as a visiting professor, I count myself as two customers. To understand the profound respect I have for Dean Jeffrey Lewis, I ask you to imagine a hypothetical executive hired for a comparable management position in a non-academic organization.

Here's the story: An experienced executive from the South is recruited to take a high-level management position heading a well-known division of a sizable charitable organization in a large Midwestern city.¹ The charitable organization's long-serving chief executive officer is a force of nature who has transformed the overall organization. The new executive's job involves getting to know the division's supporters and asking them to part with large chunks of cash. This needs to be done without giving the donors the idea that they should tell the new executive how to do his job. The senior members of the new executive's workforce have job security and (to be realistic) cannot be fired, even if their customers are unhappy. (Paradoxically, in former times, unhappy customers used to be a sign that a worker was doing his job particularly well.) Many of the new executive's colleagues secretly believe they could do the job better than he, though on some level they are grateful that it is he who actually has to do the job. Perhaps they ought to be more grateful because similar executives at such organizations stay in their jobs only an average of five years. Some move on to be executives elsewhere or to be CEOs themselves, and some go back to serving their organizations' customers.

In his eleven-year run, Jeff Lewis has risen far above this hypothetical executive. His leadership of Saint Louis University School of Law has been

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1. I realize there are some who would quibble with the designation "high level," believing the apocryphal story about the distinguished visitor who drove up the front driveway of a prestigious law school and asked where he should park. "I'll ask the dean," the receptionist said. "No, don't bother the dean," the visitor said, "There must be someone here lower than the dean who knows the answer." "No sir," the receptionist replied, "There is no one here lower than the dean."

transformative—a word that fits perfectly even though it currently suffers from overuse. If a dean can keep as diverse and contentious a community as a law school reasonably content for more than a decade—and keep his own sense of humor and perspective—he must be judged a resounding success.

Eleven years ago, neither he nor his new colleagues really knew what they were getting. Getting a new dean is like Forrest Gump's definition of life—a box of chocolates from which you never know what you are going to get. Five years really is the average tenure of a law school dean, for reasons that we may infer from my first paragraph.²

When he first arrived, I invited him to meet with the members of the Supreme Court of Missouri. He took the opportunity right away, and he has consistently kept touch with courts of all kinds. As significant, he reads our decisions and keeps students in his classes informed of pertinent cases.

As a dean and as a teacher, Jeff is patient, he is persistent, and he leads as well by example as by exhortation. For instance, when Jeff came to Saint Louis University, he said that faculty should teach classes at 8:00 a.m., so he has taught classes at 8:00 a.m. In fact, he has served the customers, the students, by teaching a course in Evidence nearly every year of his deanship, often at 8:00 a.m.

In his patient, persistent leadership, one characteristic stands out: every decision, every move that he has made, has been motivated solely by what is best for this Law School. I can detect no other agenda. That is why, I believe, he has maintained a high level of respect from his colleagues, the students, the alumni, and the University's leaders. Each, I am just as sure, has had occasion to disagree with him—that is, after all, what some see as part of their jobs. But no one has doubted his motives. Jeff has spent most of his waking hours for the past eleven years thinking about what is best for this School.

The test of a dean's tenure is simple: Is this a better place than when he came here?

During his tenure, the number of faculty more than doubled, causing the student-to-faculty ratio to drop from 22.9:1³ to about 15:1.⁴ The number of women faculty members has almost tripled,⁵ and the number of minority

2. See Karen Sloan, *Wisconsin's Davis is the Latest Law Dean to Step Down*, NAT'L L.J. (Sept. 9, 2010), <http://www.law.com/jsp/nlj/PubArticleNLJ.jsp?id=1202471832973&rss=nlj&slreturn=1&hblogin=1>.

3. ABA, OFFICIAL AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION GUIDE TO APPROVED LAW SCHOOLS 358 (Rick L. Morgan & Kurt Snyder eds., 2000 ed.) (using data from 1998 and 1999) [hereinafter ABA 2000].

4. The student-faculty ratio is calculated from 2009–2010 data from the Law School.

5. ABA 2000, *supra* note 3, at 358 (citing nineteen female faculty members); LAW SCHOOL ADMISSION COUNCIL & ABA SECTION OF LEGAL EDUC. & ADMISSIONS TO THE BAR, ABA-LSAC OFFICIAL GUIDE TO ABA-APPROVED LAW SCHOOLS 640 (2011 ed.) (using data from 2008 and 2009) (citing fifty-four female faculty members) [hereinafter LSAC & ABA 2011].

faculty members has more than quadrupled.⁶ He also improved the composition of the student body by creating the 1843 Scholars program to recruit high-achieving students. He established small-section classes for first-year courses, allowing the students to receive more individualized instruction and more interaction with faculty. The number of available courses increased.⁷ The size of the legal clinics tripled during his deanship.⁸ He greatly increased the resources directed to helping students prepare for the bar examination. It is noteworthy that on the most recent July examination, SLU was virtually tied for first place for first-time takers among the seven schools in the region and, with a pass rate of almost ninety-five percent, the school was nearly five points ahead of the overall percentage of first-time applicants who passed.⁹ Finally, the percentage of students employed nine months after graduation has increased.¹⁰

Most assuredly, the Law School is a better place. The teaching quality is superb; the scholarly output is extraordinary. The respect the School receives throughout the country is substantial, and it has improved markedly during his tenure. The School, as importantly, is a place that nourishes the ideal of service and prepares its graduates for lives of service.

All of this does not happen solely because of the dean. But these things do not happen without great leadership.

Jeff Lewis has been a great leader. I hope we are all appropriately grateful. Speaking just for myself, as a judge and a professor, I am two satisfied customers.

6. ABA 2000, *supra* note 3, at 358 (citing 4 minority faculty members); LSAC & ABA 2011, *supra* note 5, at 640 (citing 17 minority faculty members).

7. ABA 2000, *supra* note 3, at 358 (citing 90 upper-level courses); LSAC & ABA 2011, *supra* note 5, at 640 (citing 150 upper-level courses).

8. ABA 2000, *supra* note 3, at 358 (citing 548 available positions in simulation courses); LSAC & ABA 2011, *supra* note 5, at 640 (citing 1211 available positions in simulation courses).

9. *Bar Passage Rate Falls for July Test Takers in Missouri*, MO. LAWYERS MEDIA (Oct. 10, 2010), <http://molawyersmedia.com/blog/2010/10/10/bar-passage-rate-falls-for-july-test-takers/>.

10. ABA 2000, *supra* note 3, at 358–59 (using data from 1998 and 1999); LSAC & ABA 2011, *supra* note 5, at 640–42 (using data from 2008 and 2009); Jeffrey E. Lewis, Dean Emeritus and Professor of Law, <http://law.slu.edu/faculty/profiles/profile.asp?username=lewisje> (last visited Sept. 28, 2010). For bar examination statistics, see *Bar Passage Rate Falls for July Test Takers in Missouri*, *supra* note 9. The student-faculty ratio is calculated from 2009–2010 data from the Law School.

