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President's Column: THE RELATIONSHIP OF LEADERSHIP, JUDICIAL EDUCATION, AND JUDICIAL EXCELLENCE

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"President's Column: THE RELATIONSHIP OF LEADERSHIP, JUDICIAL EDUCATION, AND JUDICIAL EXCELLENCE"
(2014). *Court Review: The Journal of the American Judges Association*. 467.
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President's Column

THE RELATIONSHIP OF LEADERSHIP, JUDICIAL EDUCATION, AND JUDICIAL EXCELLENCE

Elliott Zide

Being AJA president has put me in a sort of catbird seat attending a number of events that provide the opportunity to interact with thoughtful judges and court leaders and to gain perspective on the importance and value of AJA's mission of Making Better Judges.

I was appointed to the Massachusetts District Court in 1986 at a time when then-Chief Justice Samuel E. Zoll and the court's administrative director, Jerome S. Berg (an early graduate of what became the National Center for State Courts' Institute of Court Management), were moving forward with an ambitious strategy to transform the district courts from perceived places of rough justice to a more credibly fair and impartial institution where there is the sort of due process everyone can believe in. Zoll and Berg were convinced of the transformative nature of professional development and established a judicial education committee, which I chaired from 1992 to 2007.

I was fortunate enough to be introduced to Patricia Murrell¹ in time to learn some important lessons about the relationship of leadership and judicial education. Pat's most enduring legacy is that she provided a generation of judicial education leaders with valuable tools we could use, and teach others to use, to make better judges and transform our courts.

Judicial educators and organizations like AJA become powerful transforming agents because we hold true and are firm in the belief that judges are knowledgeable, skillful, ethical, caring, and honorable professionals and that engagement in new learning is motivating, forward thinking, energizing, and brings value to the judiciary. That is why AJA is critical to the success of judges and how it happens that AJA directly benefits the peace, tranquility, and prosperity of our civil society. This is AJA's story and we need to tell it in way that is clear and convincing.

It was more than serendipity when I attended a judicial excellence dinner in Massachusetts where my colleague Judith

Fabricant was honored and said:

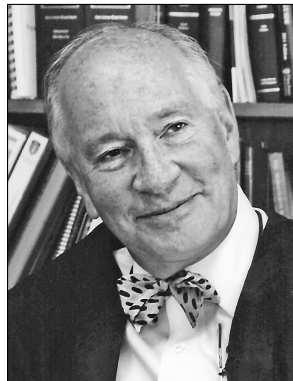
"We tend to think of excellence as the quality of a single judge—something each of us tries to achieve as we sit alone in our courtrooms, or writing in our lobbies. All of that is true.

"But I think judicial excellence is also a communal endeavor—something we strive for together, and something we achieve, if we do, together. I would suggest that judicial excellence *depends* on our joint efforts—we cannot achieve it individually.

If our court system as a whole provides quality justice to the public, then we all succeed in serving our mission, and we all can be justifiably proud. If not, if we have pockets of excellence but a pattern of inconsistency, then the public does not receive what it expects and is due, and that reflects on all of us.

"We achieve excellence together, I suggest, by sharing with each other: by sharing whatever expertise we have developed; by giving our time to offer educational programs; by mentoring new colleagues; by consulting with each other on difficult problems; by offering support when any of us is under attack, and by working together to improve the administration of our court."

Now then, if leadership is the capacity to discern and develop resources, human or material, and if leadership involves organizing and ordering those resources to resolve a problem, realize a vision, or achieve a goal, leadership has to start with who we are and then move to what we do. And since education is the most powerful tool in the leader's tool box, and since AJA offers a wide variety of education opportunities and publications, Prof. Murrell, Judge Fabricant, and AJA are excellent leaders. Right! Of course right.



1. Dr. Patricia Murrell recently retired from the faculty at the University of Memphis, where in 1988 she helped found the Leadership Institute in Judicial Education and the Institute for Faculty Excellence in Judicial Education. She has made a tremendous difference in the field of judicial-branch education and in the

lives of countless judges, judicial educators, and colleagues. Many of us who were influenced greatly by attending Pat's leadership programs were asked to write tributes on the occasion of Pat's retirement. Some of the thoughts in this message come from that tribute.