

# ***COMMENTS OF ART VERTLIEB, QC ON THE OCCASION OF THE GEORGES A. GOYER, QC AWARD PRESENTATION***

I am honoured to be nominated by Ken Walton, QC, Anna Fung, QC and Georgeann Glover and am honoured by the women and men of the Canadian Bar Association to be selected for this recognition.

Looking back I will always cherish the honour bestowed on me on June 28, 1973 when I was given the privilege of taking the Barristers' and Solicitors' oath and becoming a member of this noble profession. It is a great honour indeed, given the countless generations who have come before me and who will come after me forging the path of justice in succeeding generations.

Our profession is marked by central values such as honesty, integrity, learning, and commitment. These values must never be compromised in the pursuit of justice. But there is one core value that we do not perhaps articulate enough – that is the core value of respect.

Early in my career, I was told that you cannot be a successful lawyer unless you have the respect of your clients, the respect of the Bench, and the respect of your colleagues. In other words – respect for the law and all that it embraces.

We can all recognize there are many ways this core value of respect is evidenced. For our clients, we are taught to embrace that the clients' interest is paramount in every circumstance and is never to be compromised. Our work is not about our ego, our needs, or our own body of work. Our labours are a true reflection of the concern that we always place our clients' interest above our own in recognition of the great privilege bestowed on us every time a client comes to us for help.

Our respect for the Bench is evidenced every day. It explains why we bow when we enter the Court, why do not become petulant at losing a ruling, and why we bow when we leave the Court, even having lost the case.

Our respect for our colleagues is shown in the way we treat one another. We refer to each other as "My Learned Friend" respecting that we are all members of a learned profession. Even though we are adversarial in process, we do not intentionally embarrass a colleague for any reason, let alone the mere fact that they are representing a client who is adverse in interest to our client. It is why we shake hands at the end of the case, regardless of the result. It is why commercial lawyers will not take advantage of an obvious drafting error by a colleague. It is why corporate counsel treat one another with respect even when acting in the interest of business competitors.

These are not mere words. All of us can think of examples where these principles have come to life.

This core value of respect is also evidenced by the contributions of our Bar organizations. Consider the Canadian Bar Association which, to its credit, has taken up the cause of Omar Khadr. This is a man who few, if any, of us have met but the issues surrounding his detention go to the fundamental values of the rule of law and the protection provided to all our citizens in a democratic society. As unpopular as his cause may be, the Canadian Bar Association is to be commended by all.

Consider the work of the Trial Lawyers Association of British Columbia which continuously stands up for the rights for individuals who need access to our Court system. As well, TLABC is premised on, and continues to advance, a sharing of knowledge and information by members of our profession, all in the interest of better serving our community.

Consider the work of the Lawyers Assistance Program and the caring shown by the members of this endeavour. The women and men of the LAP give so much of themselves, sometimes in difficult circumstances. Nonetheless, the volunteers of LAP are there for the betterment of our profession.

Consider the Benchers of the Law Society of British Columbia. Your Benchers are volunteers who work tirelessly and faithfully to protect the independence of the Bar while ensuring that the public interest is always the paramount consideration.

This core value of respect is found in other organizations such as the Law Foundation of British Columbia, the Continuing Legal Education Society, the BC Courthouse Library Society, and countless other Bar organizations whose members, in the truest sense of respect for the profession, devote enormous amounts of energy for the good of all.

Respect permeates *who* we are, *what* we do, and *why* we do and we can all be proud of this. To my colleagues here this evening, I ask you to continue to foster and nourish respect for one another. Embrace the adversary system but never lose sight of the need to always show respect for our clients, the Bench and our colleagues.

In the words of U Thant, former Secretary General of the United Nations:

“Every human being, of whatever origin, of whatever station, deserves respect. We must each respect others even as we respect ourselves”

To bring matters closer to home, I would like to paraphrase the legendary H.A.D. Oliver, QC:

“We are all just humble gardeners in the vineyard of justice.”

With this in mind:

We all have more tilling to do and I am proud and honoured to help nourish the land with the women and men of this great profession.

Thank you.