



by H. Reese Hansen

It is a pleasure to formally welcome you to the Law School. You are the 27th entering class of the J. Reuben Clark Law School, the last to be admitted in the 20th century. I congratulate you for being admitted and for your decision to attend law school here. I am grateful that you are here.

I love the first day of school. I always have, and it may be that the excitement I have always felt when school starts each fall contributed to my decision to be a teacher. I still remember vividly, even after 30 years, when I was where you

Special Obligation

are today. I was a young father with three children, from a little farm and railroad town in the northernmost reaches of Utah nobody ever heard of, unsure of anything about law school, but I wanted to become a lawyer. Because I had been out of college for five years, I was a bit older than all but one or two in my class, and I didn't know a single person there.

In the next weeks I became sure of one thing about law school: every single living, breathing human being in my class was at least twice as smart as I was. But out of those three years were forged some of the choicest friendships of my life. It will be that way for you too.

I want to talk today a bit about the responsibility that runs with the opportunity to study law at BYU.

One of the most difficult things we do is to select from the large pool of applicants those who will be extended the invitation to come here to law school. We feel a special kind of stewardship using the resources made available to us by the board of trustees. Although our law school tuition totals several thousand dollars each year, each one of you is receiving, in essence, a scholarship worth more than \$15,000 per year. That \$15,000-plus is the difference between your tuition payment and what it is costing each year for your

*The following address was presented
to the entering class of the J. Reuben
Clark Law School on August 16, 1999.*

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education at the Law School. The \$15,000 is paid primarily by appropriations to the university from tithing funds of the Church. Another large portion comes from the financial contributions of our alumni and donors. I believe it is fair to say that there is no law school in the country, public or private, where the students are as generously supported as you are.

For every one of you who is here this morning, there are five qualified students who have hoped and prayed with their families that they could study law at BYU but who could not be admitted. I think these facts mean that you and I have a special kind of obligation while we are here to strive in every way to make our law school the very best that it can be, both in the intellectual rigor of our courses and in the moral and ethical environment in which we conduct ourselves.

Almost all of you are here because you want to practice law. Today you begin the real work of becoming lawyers. I can promise you that you will be challenged in law study. The study of law is different from the kind of study you are familiar with from undergraduate school. In law school you will be disciplined to learn not just what the rules of law are but, more important, to understand why the rules are what they are. Because in so many cases it is not possible to be certain which rules of law will govern a particular situation, it is only by thoroughly understanding the rationale of relevant rules that you can be equipped to responsibly counsel clients about the probable legal outcome of anticipated actions or existing disputes. It is the ability to recognize which rules may be relevant and how those rules will affect a unique circumstance that makes legal education distinctive.

The ability to understand why things *are as they are* is greatly aided by coming to really see and appreciate how persons with different perspectives see them. Your class is made up of people who come from many walks of life, from all over the country and the world. You are surrounded by a group of people who have been carefully selected to bring together persons of uncommon intellectual ability who also have life experiences and cultural backgrounds that will enrich your legal education in important

ways. The value of diversity among fellow students is perhaps greater in legal education than in any other course of study.

Because to study law is to study the regulation of human interaction, a knowledge of the different mind-sets, world views, ethnic groups, tribes, religions, and genders that make up the global family of man is essential to your education. The diversity of your individual experiences and back-



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grounds provides the opportunity for you to open up new windows and vantage points from which to see the tapestry of life.

Our sincere hope is that each of you will enter into dialogue with your colleagues in an honest effort to listen to others with the same willingness to understand their truths and make them yours that you wish for them to give your own. If you will do that, your life will be enriched and blessed, and you will be a blessing to others.

Each of you is well equipped to be successful in law study. Based upon your academic achievements, your class easily ranks in the smartest 20 entering law classes in the country this year. I want to assure you that you will succeed here if you are willing to do the work.

Because law study is so different, and because it is hard work, many of you will become impatient with the process. A few of you may decide that the effort required to philosophically integrate required knowledge with disciplined reasoning skills is simply too great and will look for shortcuts to the answer. Those who seek shortcuts miss the intellectual fun of law school and substantially waste their time and their ability and shortchange themselves in preparing to become lawyers. Someone else's work cannot possibly provide you with the tools you will need to become effective lawyers.

While you are here, you will quickly see that the faculty will expect the very best you can give. This is not a place where you will learn some version of LDS law in a Sunday School-like setting. President James E. Faust taught this to law students recently when he said, "Do not expect your professor . . . to concentrate [your] lessons out of the scriptures. [Your teacher's] obligation is to teach you the secular rules of law and related matters. The whisperings of the Holy Spirit will no doubt help you, but you must learn the rules of law, using Churchill's phrase, by 'blood, sweat, and tears.' Just having a good heart will not get the job done."

You owe it to yourself, your family, other supporters, and to your future clients to do everything you can do in the next three years to become technically competent as a lawyer. The process of becoming truly competent does not accommodate the expedience of shortcuts.

I cannot talk about your becoming lawyers without speaking about the matter of ethics and integrity. All of the lawyer jokes notwithstanding, a lawyer's integrity is the bedrock foundation of successful lawyering. Ethics and integrity are the most fundamental tenet of professionalism.

As you will come to know, every member of the legal profession is subject to the Code of Professional Conduct, which provides express guidance and limitations on lawyer behavior. It seems to

me, therefore, that your commitment and full compliance with the BYU Honor Code is a worthy step in your becoming the kind of men and women who can be trusted by clients, courts, and fellow attorneys. James Monroe said, "The question to be asked at the end of an educational step is not what has the student learned, but what has the student become."

I suggest that each of you rereads the BYU Honor Code, which you are pledged to keep. Some requirements of the Honor Code may seem unimportant or irrelevant, even silly, i.e., length of hair, style of clothes, and we acknowledge that the subject of these standards of personal appearance is not nearly as important as the standards related to honesty, chastity, and respecting others' personal and property rights that are also parts of the Honor Code. I hope you will review and seriously ponder those parts in which you have committed

1. to act with graciousness and consideration for others;
2. to be honest in *all* behavior. This includes not cheating, plagiarizing, or knowingly giving false information;
3. to respect the personal rights of others—not physically or verbally abusing any person—not obstructing or disrupting the study of others;
4. to respect the property rights of others and to obey, honor, and sustain the law.

Our institutional response with regard to the Honor Code will depend upon the nature of the violation. But your personal obligation, sealed by the strength of your personal promise, is to keep them all. Our expectation is that you will keep your word.

Your personal honesty is your most important professional credential. In the press of too busy lives and the pressure to perform, some of you will be tempted to take shortcuts that violate rules of ordinary courtesy, decency, and honesty. These pressures, which you are almost certain to feel in law school, will be greater than you have experienced yet in any other part of your life and are common in the legal profession.

It is important that as you undertake the study of law, you are more vigilant than ever before in guarding your integrity against the temptations to "succeed at any cost." Real deadlines with real conse-

quences are the common reality in the practice of law. In law practice, papers have to be filed on time, deals have to be completed by certain dates, commitments have to be kept, or cases and fortunes can be lost. Because this is so, lawyers have to learn to factor personal interruptions and emergencies into their schedules so that deadlines can be kept. It is going to be that way in law school, too.

Please hear this: It is vitally important that you plan ahead and perform your plan in a timely way so that you will not put yourself in a position of facing the temptation to perform on time by stealing another person's ideas or work. Sadly, almost every year we have to deal with cases of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. These cases are almost always the product of an over-scheduled life or failure to discipline oneself to do the work when it needs to be done—or both. The rationalization process usually runs something like this: "I could do the work if I just had the time; I don't have time, but it is not my fault; no one will know; this paper is just not all that important in the scheme of my legal education, let alone my whole life; and no one is going to be hurt."

Academic professional shortcuts involving the theft of another's work are unacceptable here or at any other law school and will result in serious academic discipline. Acts of dishonesty by lawyers result in professional discipline, even disbarment. Your brothers and sisters of the bar simply have no tolerance for dishonesty in any of its forms. Neither do we, and neither should you.

As you pursue your legal education, my deepest hope is that you will never abandon the teachings of integrity and kindness that you received in your homes. One of the embarrassments I suffer is illustrated by complaints I have fielded from an occasional shopkeeper or landlord, ticket agent, or clerk in the registration office or other office, of a law student who has ignored common courtesy and invoked his or her supposed understanding of the law and flexed a newly formed legal muscle, to take unfair advantage or insist upon a supposed right. It is often said that the boorish behavior of first-year law students has ruined more Thanksgiving Day family dinners than any other single factor.

Please remember in your dealings with each other, indeed with everyone you see, to exemplify civility and grace.

There will be temptation, sometimes considerable temptation, with the anxiety about performance and class standing, to try to outrun everybody in the class at any cost. President Faust warned:

There is a great risk in justifying what we do individually and professionally on the basis of what is "legal" rather than what is "right." In so doing, we put our very souls at risk. The philosophy that what is "legal" is also "right" will rob us of what is highest and best in our nature. What conduct is actually "legal" is, in many instances, way below the standards of a civilized society and light years below the teaching of the Christ. If you accept what is "legal" as your standard of personal or professional conduct, you will rob yourself of that which is truly noble in your personal dignity and worth. You can be just as tough as you want as an advocate, but you must never, never lower your own integrity.

It is, therefore, critically important while you are in law school and thereafter that as you search for knowledge, you also seek wisdom; as you obtain the power to reason, you also strive for compassion; as you strive to succeed, you embrace morality; as you seek justice, you demonstrate mercy.

As you enter the profession, seek to serve its highest purpose: to help others realize their best potential. The most important role of a lawyer is to help and heal. Please remember in your dealings with each other, indeed with everyone you see, to exemplify civility, grace, and integrity. In the end, your self-worth will not be measured by your law school grade point average or class standing, by your beginning salary, or the total of your lifetime earnings or by how soon you become a partner. Self-worth is measured by the manner in which you have served others.

We welcome you as colleagues in the legal profession. We are proud to have you be a part of the BYU Law School. We are as anxious to get started as you are. May God bless our united efforts to become the best in all ways that we can be.

H. Reese Hansen has served as dean of the J. Reuben Clark Law School since 1990.