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The Plumb Line

The principles embodied in A Lawyer’s Creed and the Aspirational Statement on Professionalism help us remain true to what should be the normal in lawyers’ dealings with their clients, opposing counsel, colleagues, courts, other legal professionals and the public in general.

BY KARLISE Y. GRIER

The plumb bob or plumb line employs the law of gravity to establish what is “plumb” (that is, what is exactly vertical, or true).¹

I once heard a speaker say that society cannot let the crazy, the abnormal and the actions that we believe are wrong become the “normal.” No matter how painful it might sometimes be to face the circumstances of the day, we cannot become numb to what is wrong around us. This is true of what happens in our world. It is also true of what happens in our profession. We have to fight against the sentiment that “it’s just the way things are” when we know something is wrong or abnormal. Becoming desensitized and simply ignoring unacceptable conduct should not be an option.

When you read this article, the first two months of the “new year” will be almost complete. Yet, with most of 2023 in front of us, it will still be the perfect time



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One tenet of A Lawyer’s Creed and the Aspirational Statement on Professionalism states: “The dignity and the integrity of our profession is an inheritance that must be maintained by each successive generation of lawyers.”

to dust off your copy of A Lawyer’s Creed and the Aspirational Statement on Professionalism² and consider the “plumb line.” One tenet of A Lawyer’s Creed and the Aspirational Statement on Professionalism states: “The dignity and the integrity of our profession is an inheritance that must be maintained by each successive generation of lawyers.” You might ask, “What does this have to do with a plumb line?” A plumb line (or plumb bob) is a tool dating back to ancient Egypt. Evidence suggests that Egyptian architects used plumb bob-like tools to establish verticals in constructing the pyramids between 2600 BCE and 2500 BCE.

A Lawyer’s Creed and the Aspirational Statement on Professionalism also gives us principles to help establish what is true for our profession. The creed embodies principles such as honesty, truthfulness, trustworthiness, integrity, fairness and civility. These principles are our “verticals” to help us remain true to what should be the normal in lawyers’ dealings with their clients, opposing counsel, colleagues, courts, other legal professionals and the public in general.

Notice, the plumb does not change its result based on the circumstances in which it is placed. It remains a true measure of the vertical. Likewise, despite the circumstances in which we are placed as lawyers, our true principles should remain the same. The “result” we should

give when someone is rude, dishonest, condescending, untrustworthy, unfair or uncivil is not determined by our circumstances but by our plumb line, the vertical that should show our true character. Does this sound unrealistic and out of touch? If yes, perhaps that is because we have allowed—or are allowing—the abnormal and the crazy to seem normal. For our generation of lawyers to have an inheritance of dignity and integrity to share with future lawyers, we should all have a plumb line that keeps us vertical—which is also defined as upright³ or upstanding.⁴

It won’t always be easy to remain true to the aspirational goals to which the Supreme Court of Georgia in 1992 asked lawyers to adhere in A Lawyer’s Creed and the Aspirational Statement on Professionalism. We should, nevertheless, not lose sight of these aspirational goals as the normal. This generation of lawyers will, I hope, stand against accepting as normal behavior that is rude, dishonest, condescending, untrustworthy, unfair or uncivil on the occasions when we see it in our profession.

Just as Bob Vila continues to use a plumb line tool similar to the tool the Egyptians used almost 5,000 years ago, let’s continue to use the aspirational goals given to us by the Supreme Court of Georgia a little more than 30 years ago to help keep us vertical so that we may maintain the dignity and the integrity of

our profession as an inheritance for the next generation of lawyers. ●



Karlise Y. Grier
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Endnotes

1. Bob Vila, The Plumb Bob: What Is This Tool, and How Do You Use It?, Bob Vila, Tools & Workshop (Last visited Dec. 16, 2022), <https://www.bobvila.com/articles/495-the-plumb-bob/>.
2. Chief Justice’s Commission on Professionalism, *A Lawyer’s Creed and Aspirational Statement on Professionalism* at lines 64 - 66 (Last visited Dec. 16, 2022), <http://cjcpga.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/2-Lawyers-CreedAspStatement-v-2013-Line-Number-with-new-logo-and-seal-v07-25-19.pdf>.
3. Upright is on synonym for vertical. One definition of upright is “marked by strong moral rectitude,” Merriam-Webster, Inc, Dictionary, upstanding (Dec. 16, 2022), <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/upright>.
4. Upstanding is on synonym for vertical. One definition of upstanding is “marked by integrity,” Merriam-Webster, Inc, Dictionary, upstanding (Dec. 16, 2022), <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/upstanding>.