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Lessons from Logan: Lessons in Life from David Logan

Mary J. Davis*

I remember the first time I saw David Logan. It was 1982. I was a first-year student at Wake Forest Law School. First torts class was about to start. He bounded down the stairs in Room 7 in the old law building, taking them four or five at a time. He paced the front of the classroom like a caged tiger. This larger-than-life professor already had a reputation around the law school after only a year or so on the faculty—energetic, brilliant, mesmerizing in the classroom, and, yes, a little scary. I don't remember who he called on first that day, but I thanked my lucky stars it was not me. It is hard to believe that was forty years ago—I remember it like it was yesterday. Some of life's experiences become fixed in our minds because of their impact on us. I am very lucky to have been in that torts class to learn from and become a friend and colleague of Prof. David Logan.

Those reading this essay know Dean and Professor Logan in a variety of ways. I know him as a former torts student from his early days and, I can tell you, he was a master in the classroom even then. What I didn't know then was that he would change my life's career path in ways that I could hardly imagine. It is not an overstatement for me to say that I would not have had the career I have had but for David Logan. Not because he was a fabulous torts professor, which he was. Not because I became a great lawyer because of him,

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which, truth be told, I did not. It is because of the lessons in life that he taught me over the last forty years as a professor, mentor, colleague, and friend. People come into your life for reasons you can't understand at the time but, in the fullness of time, you realize the outsized impact some of those people have had on you. David Logan has been one of those out-sized people in my life (no pun intended given his height!). I have him to thank for my career in the legal academy, the greatest job there is in the law. I am honored to have the opportunity to share some of the things I learned from professor, mentor, colleague, and friend David Logan along my path in the law.

Prof. David Logan opened his students' minds in countless ways. He filled the great open spaces in our empty heads with concern for *Ms. Seffert's injury*,¹ disdain for *Brian Dailey's five-year old hijinks*,² worry about *Mrs. Palsgraf's stutter* and the *Long Island Railroad's failure to protect her*,³ and all Tort law's rules in between. He made the assorted obscure concepts real while making room for both empathy and toughness. He also effortlessly made laughter and camaraderie with us part of our experience. He made a statement in the classroom in every way: his command of the room, his energy and passion for the mundane as well as the complex and his groovy 70s ties. To this day, he is the best teacher I have ever seen.

Teaching law was a faint whisper in my head from those early days in torts. But I always ignored the whisper; that path was almost certainly not meant for me. I would not have imagined a career in law teaching had it not been for the mesmerizing Prof. Logan in the classroom and the lessons in law and life he taught his students.

I have culled out of my experiences with David Logan five lessons he taught me. These lessons illustrate the impact he has had on generations of lawyers, and, in my case, a law professor. Here are my top five Lessons from Logan.

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1. *Seffert v. Los Angeles Transit Lines*, 364 P.2d 337 (Cal. 1961).
 2. *Garratt v. Dailey*, 279 P.2d 1091 (Wash. 1955).
 3. *Palsgraf v. Long Island R.R. Co.*, 162 N.E. 99 (N.Y. 1928).

1. *Share Your Notes.*

In other words, be generous. Your effort to learn something for yourself, to try hard, to succeed is something to be proud of and to protect. There is also immense satisfaction in the good you can do when you share your hard work with others who may not have your skill, time, or ability.

When I started teaching Torts at the University of Kentucky College of Law in 1991, I decided to use the same torts casebook that I learned from under Prof. Logan. That first semester, and several after it, was tough. It really is difficult to teach concepts that have become second nature to you. Not everyone can do it. David Logan could do it. He helped me do it by sharing his notes with me. I still have the copies he sent me of those hand-written, dog-eared yellow-legal pad pages of his teaching notes.

Having David's notes helped me see what I was capable of. David was invested in my success because David is a person who gives of himself to others. He probably did not think about whether sharing his notes with me would help me or not; he just did it because he is generous.

Law school is competitive; law students are ambitious, typically. Lawyers are driven to succeed. David Logan's generosity is a constant reminder that life is not a zero-sum game. Share your notes. Help others see what they are capable of.

2. *Accept the Notes of Others.*

It's not a fault to be vulnerable and to need help sometimes. Accept help. We don't have all the answers. David Logan is generous to a fault—generous with his time, his talents, his support, and his encouragement.

While toiling away at products liability defense work, I struggled with whether I would ever be in a position to get into law teaching. I had little idea about how one becomes a law professor or whether I should even try. David encouraged me to see that building readiness for law teaching happens over time but also involves intentionality. He encouraged me to contact Wake Forest to ask whether a position as an adjunct professor might be available while I was practicing law in Winston-Salem. I would never have asked on my own, never even thought about it, without his encouragement. Having the opportunity to teach Products Liability while a

practicing attorney gave me credibility when it came time to apply for law teaching jobs.

We often have to “get out of our own way” in life and recognize when we need the help of others. David never failed to offer his advice, help, opinions, and share his mistakes. Maybe this is what good mentors do. David Logan is the only person who I would call a mentor. I could always trust his advice. This lesson is about finding out what you need from people you trust. There is not a more trustworthy person on this planet than David Logan.

3. *Shake Things Up.*

Lawyers are rule followers, usually. I am comfortable with rules. I like rules. But it’s important to shake things up every now and then. You don’t have to fit into a mold. Get out of your comfort zone.

Early in my career, I was presented with an opportunity to be a visiting professor at another law school. I had no idea that was even possible, or whether it was a good idea. David, for whom “no” is not in his dictionary, said, “What? Of course, you must go!” The opportunity was great—hard to do, but great. Push the boundaries of what you think you are capable of.

David always appears to be capable of doing anything. He certainly showed his students and colleagues that you have no idea what waits outside the lines. Don’t be afraid to shake things up.

4. *Dance with Abandon.*

New York, New York. Frank Sinatra. It played at every law school party in Winston-Salem, N.C., in the early 1980s. Who danced? Everyone, with David Logan in the thick of it. Just dance! Have fun. Live in the moment. Throw your arms around and live it up. Never miss a chance to dance.

5. *Do More.*

David Logan taught me that you must not shy away from doing hard things. David has been a leader in all he has done. Maybe it’s the burden of being a person who is so clearly the biggest “horse in the race,” as we say in Kentucky. He leads, naturally. He always sought opportunities to do more with his gifts, whether while a professor at Wake Forest or when he decided to become a dean. David

has not been complacent in his career. He does not settle for the easy, comfortable path.

Every dean will tell you that being a dean is challenging; honestly, it's hard. But as they say in baseball, "Of course it's hard. If it was easy, anybody could do it. It's the hard that makes it great."⁴ David's passion and energy for the hard job of being a good dean impresses me more now that I am a dean. We would talk sometimes about the job as I began to consider it for my own path. He was frank about the challenges, but he always reminded me not to shy away from doing what is hard. It's the hard that makes it great, and the service to a community that matters to you.

When David saw the opportunity to become the Dean of the Roger Williams University School of Law, he did not hesitate. The fit was perfect; he admired everything about the school and was, and is, its champion. I envy those of you who have had the opportunity to experience his passionate leadership. He would say that he is the one to be envied for having the opportunity to serve, to do more for the legal community of Roger Williams University School of Law.

Those are my Lessons from Logan. You will undoubtedly have your own. He has certainly had an extraordinary legal academic life, an impactful life, on generations of students, and a life of leadership in the law. I am immensely grateful to have had the good fortune to be his student, mentee, colleague, and friend, and to learn a lifetime of lessons. For me, his legacy is one of boundless energy for the good of others.

4. *A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN* (Sony Pictures 1992). A great baseball movie about the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League that started in 1942 during World War II.