

Westwind

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Four Keys to the Future

School of Business in China
2009-10 Annual Report

Raising the Bar

By Loree Chase-Waite

June 1997. The Centennial Green at Walla Walla University is packed with proud graduates, families, and friends. Lenden Webb makes his way across the stage to receive his degree in speech communication. Fast forward 13 years.

April 2010. The marble-walled U.S. Supreme Court Building is packed with reporters, legal counsel, and spectators. Attorney Webb, having earned postgraduate degrees in business administration and law, rises from his seat, approaches the bench and is formally admitted to the bar—a distinction that allows him the chance to argue a case in front of the U.S. Supreme Court.

What happened that day in Washington, D.C., when you were admitted to the Bar of the Supreme Court?

I was expecting to be sworn in in some side room, or at the most in the main courtroom while the court was not in session. But when I drove by the night before—and again when I pulled up on my motorcycle the morning of the session—I realized the event was a bigger deal than I had thought. Outside the courthouse there was a commotion of television cameras and crowds camping out to get spectator seats.

There were 18 admittees the day we were sworn in. We went through a side door where the arguing counsel go through security screening and were briefed by an intern and then by the clerk of the court. We waited in the West Room—cracking jokes about feeling like nervous grooms. At last we left our cameras and coats and were escorted down the middle aisle through a packed court. That would be “Goosebump Moment No. 1.”

Our seats were only about six paces from the nine U.S. Supreme Court Justices. Reporters from major news agencies were to our left. The clerk called the court to order, and the justices took their seats. The motion was made to admit new counsel, and the clerk called our full names one by one.

Affirming my oath with Chief Justice John G. Roberts, Jr.—my favorite—was the highlight. I remember the words: “Do you solemnly swear that as an attorney and as a counselor of this court, you will conduct yourself uprightly and according to law, and that you will support the Constitution of the United States?” and hearing myself declare “Yes.” That would be “Goosebump Moment No. 2.”

And now, back at your law offices in Fresno and San Diego, what areas do you focus on?

I have tailored my practice to business litigation, where I enjoy helping business owners thrive

and focus on their “core competency.” I think that term was from a class with college marketing professor Julie Scott.

Regardless of the alleged stigma of the law, there is a great sense of mission in what I do as an attorney. When a client walks into my office I enjoy the chance to make a new connection, hear their story and lift their burden by telling them we will make things right. While typically we deal with businesses, I enjoy doing my best to bring justice to anyone’s level. I enjoy the sport of being an attorney, and my staff shares the passion for serving clients.

While the law isn’t always exciting, and the scales of justice don’t always tilt the way you believe they should, it is the most incredible, well-designed system on earth. And while there are not always perfect answers, most issues are resolvable with communication, reasoning, and negotiation. Regardless of their walk in life, people simply want to be heard and have their needs met.

It sounds like you place a high value on the personal aspect of your profession.

People realize their God-given purpose when they are engaged in service to others.

I believe that all professions have the potential for us to fully enjoy the wonder of service. In my case, my father, uncles, grandfathers, and great-uncles were all Seventh-day Adventist pastors, so in a sense I went astray. But I found my own niche of serving my clients with a similar zeal and a sense of mission.

Do you recall a time when you were on the receiving end of that kind of zeal?

I once missed a train—by a scant five minutes—coming home from my San Diego office. At the front of the taxi line 50 yards away was a cabbie, oblivious to my hurry, jawing with a gaggle of other cabbies. In the back of the line, there was a cabbie who recognized the problem. He started his car, drove over, and quickly helped me with my bags. By that time other cabbies



“I have a great sense of mission in my work as an attorney,” says Lenden Webb, a 1997 graduate. Webb, whose practice focuses on business litigation, has offices in Fresno and San Diego.

had noticed and were angrily protesting that he was taking a “fare” out of turn, but he stepped on the gas and burst his way through the crowd. In the taxi on the armrest, in full view for passengers to see, was a sticker that said, “Respect my hustle.”

Somewhere between his sensitivity to my need and the freeway chase to catch my train was a sizeable tip and a respect I have to this day for anyone in any profession who works hard to do a good job. I can’t imagine he feels anything but self-respect when he goes to bed at night and a sense of mission every morning.

In general, do you think the laws of the land are restricting or liberating?

Restrictions are liberating. If I know my neighbor isn’t going to walk into my house, I am free to roam the hall in my towel. And if I am not free to roam outside in my towel, that is liberating for my neighbor.

You have authored academic courses on mediation and conflict resolution, and you are a paneled mediator. What is the most important skill for people to hone in order to resolve conflict?

Listening. I often refer to a quote that Dr. Loren Dickinson cited in my college speech class; we have



two ears and one mouth, and we should use them in that proportion.

Are justice and mercy opposing forces, or can they work together?

Micah 6:8 says the two aren’t exclusive. I remember singing a song about that after vespers or at Big Lake Youth Camp: “... to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God.”

Some would say that you lose the sense of mercy when justice for your client isn’t merciful to the opposition. But I believe it is the essence of utilitarianism to help justice be served promptly rather than let wrongdoers continue spreading pain.

The law is an incredibly effective tool for normalizing behavior in the corporate world, where responsibility and accountability aren’t as paramount as they should be.

Do you think resolution always involves compromise?

It often is said that a good settlement is where no one is happy and while it is true that many disputes are a fixed-sum game, there are exceptions.

One of my favorite mediation books, “Getting To Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In,” cites two kids splitting an orange in half when they could each have had 100 percent of what they wanted. One wanted to eat the inside of the orange while the other wanted the peel to bake a cake.

Desires aren’t always that uniquely exclusive, but crafty investigation of background, motives,

and desires can lead to some surprisingly wonderful outcomes.

What problem-solving strategies do you employ in a legal setting that can apply to everyday life?

As with any relationship, communicate expectations early and often. Treat other people with respect and assume the best in them while being fully prepared for the worst. Being organized and motivated is more important than intelligence. But if you can have all three, the trifecta is beauty.

Speaking of inspiration, what gives focus and direction to your life?

My college religion professor Alden Thompson’s insight on God’s love has been a blessing. His analysis of Matthew 22:40 is key for me, especially when I think of how much we should celebrate what my dad refers to as Adventists’ unique part of God’s orchestra.

While I love the discussion at the Sabbath School I attend, nothing beats the rousing hymns and acoustics of the auditorium in the old Kretschmar Hall where full discussions would welcome every vantage point and opinion. That open spirit of dialogue is the essence of health in our religion and, more importantly, our personal spirituality. ■

Lenden Webb lives in Fresno, Calif., with his wife, Lorie (Johnson), and their 1-year-old son, Mitchell. He enjoys sailing, kayaking and surfing.

An Inside View

To gain admission to the Bar of the United States Supreme Court, candidates must have practiced for three years in the highest court of a state, territory, district, or commonwealth and be in good standing. They must also be sponsored by two members who are currently part of the bar. The high court admits new members as its first order of business at the beginning of each term.

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College Avenue Crossings

A passion for travel and teaching is why Carl Cosaert, associate professor of biblical studies at Walla Walla University, decided to lead Bible Land Study Tours for the second year. Last summer was a tour of Turkey and Greece. This summer was “The Steps of Paul” tour.

Two groups went out over the summer, one with about 40 WWU students and one with alumni, students, and interested others. During the tours, participants followed in the steps of the apostles John and Paul—across ancient Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) and the island of Patmos.

“I like to help people grow in their faith, and this is a great opportunity for that to happen,” says Cosaert.

For many, the tour makes the Bible come to life when they stand in the places they have read about. “It gives you the chance to see, hear, feel, smell, and experience the lands where the apostles and prophets lived and where the Christian faith first caught fire and spread around the world,” says Cosaert.

“It’s better than any sermon, history book, or Bible class,” he says.

More tours, including one to Israel, are scheduled during the next two years. To learn more, visit wallawalla.edu/bibletour. ■

