Professionalism and "Diversity & Inclusion" Seminar in Fort Myers

Ms. Ita M. Neymotin, Regional Counsel, Office of Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsel of the Second District Court of Appeal, together with the Lee County Bar Association, hosted a *"Professionalism and "Diversity & Inclusion" Seminar"* on June 17, 2022, featuring many wonderful guest speakers.



Honorable Kathleen Passidomo, Senate President-Designate, spoke about diversity among elected officials and how important it is to incorporate diversity at all levels. Senator Passidomo emphasizes that we should welcome diversity because when the Senate listens to different viewpoints, it makes legislation better for all people.



Honorable Gary Lesser, President of The Florida Bar, discussed the status of professionalism at The Florida Bar and the work of The Florida Bar's Special Committee for Review of Professionalism and how important it is to provide resources and to teach attorneys about professionalism. He also discussed the work being done to create a mentoring program for newer lawyers with three or less years of experience at firms of three or fewer lawyers. The work on creating this mentoring program will be completed by the end of this calendar year.



Honorable F. Scott Westheimer, President-Elect of The Florida Bar, discussed The Rules Regulating The Florida Bar and ways to avoid the disciplinary process. Mr. Westheimer gave a very informative overview of the discipline process and how to professionally handle a complaint against oneself if one should occur.



Ms. Ita M. Neymotin, Regional Counsel for The Office of Criminal Conflict & Civil Regional Counsel, Second District Court of Appeal, gave a presentation on the Guidelines of Professional Conduct. Ms. Neymotin discussed Professionalism Expectations and Standards, and also spoke about Professionalism Panels and their importance. Ms. Neymotin and her Leadership Team were very honored to receive *The Sterling Council Leadership Team Excellence Award* on June 3, 2022 for *10 years of Dedication and Leadership Excellence 2012-2022*; and, she shared their presentation with the audience.



Mr. Frank G. Abernathy, Worldwide Diversity & Inclusion Counselor and Advocate, reminded everyone that an attorney is a representative of their clients and is an officer of the court. An attorney must represent our Judicial System with integrity, as well as support and defend our legal system. Attorneys have a duty to fight for equality.



Ms. Katie Young, Assistant Director of The Florida Bar Henry Latimer Center for Professionalism, discussed how professionalism is important because of public perception. People need to have trust in the legal system. Ms. Young reminded attorneys that due to the adversarial nature of the profession, it is extremely important to be able to disagree without being disagreeable.



Honorable Ed Brodsky, State Attorney for the Twelfth Judicial Circuit of Florida and President of the Florida Prosecuting Attorneys Association, talked about civility, and how it is expected and demanded from attorneys. Attorneys must act with civility not only towards clients, but towards judges and opposing counsel as well. Mr. Brodsky also reminded us that attorneys have power, and with power comes responsibility.



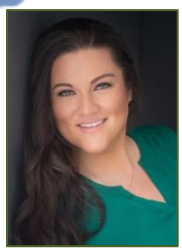
Honorable Kevin B. Anderson, Mayor of Fort Myers, discussed how diversity strengthens communities and organizations. Mayor Anderson also discussed the differences between diversity and inclusion, as they are not the same. Mayor Anderson reminded us that we need to embrace and celebrate diversity.



Honorable Howard 'Rex' Dimmig, Public Defender for the Tenth Judicial Circuit of Florida and President of the Florida Public Defender Association, discussed his research on the history of the decline in professionalism. Mr. Dimmig explained that civility among the public is declining because courteousness is seen as a sign of weakness, and clients do not want their attorneys to be perceived as weak; however, he says that this cannot deter us from fighting for professionalism.



Dr. Peter Ndiang'ui, Founding Member and Chair of Mayor Anderson's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee, gave an interesting presentation titled, "Overcoming the Enemy Within Your Own Self". Dr. Ndiang'ui reminded us that there can be no ambiguity in law, and that the United States Constitution has to be respected.



Honorable Tiffany Pereira, President of the Lee County Bar Association, talked about what it is like being a young female attorney and a mother in our society. Ms. Pereira spoke of the importance of holding ourselves accountable, even after an unprofessional act, and to please utilize the resources and training available to attorneys in regards to professionalism.



Mr. Henry Lee Paul, Former Member of The Florida Bar Student Education and Admissions Committee, reminded us that clients are not property, attorneys do not own them. Mr. Paul also emphasized the importance of respecting the profession, whether in public or private firms, and to treat everyone with civility.



Ms. Holly Cosby, President of the Calusa Chapter of the Inns of Court, comes from a diverse background, and as such has a front row seat to diversity. Ms. Cosby explained that discussions about diversity are uncomfortable because people tend to lean towards the familiar, but change must be persistently imposed. She emphasized that we cannot ignore the need for equity and dignity.



Ms. Kelly Fayer, Past President of the Lee County Bar Association, discussed the history of the Lee County Bar Association's Diversity & Inclusion Committee. Ms. Fayer, through a personal and touching story about a close friend, urged everyone to celebrate heritage, to be memorable, and to want to make the world a better place.

