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# THE PERSONAL SIDE OF A DEANSHIP\*

*David E. Shipley\*\**

**W**HEN I became the dean at Ole Miss in 1990, the workshop for new deans was held in late January or early February in connection with the ABA's midyear meeting. The baby deans met for a two-day program before the regular Deans' Workshop. My mentor from my 13 years on the South Carolina faculty, Dean John Montgomery, encouraged me to go and said I would learn a great deal. Even though I already had been deaning for 6 or 7 months and weathered a couple of storms, the new Deans' Workshop in Seattle was a valuable program for me, and I am sure that the other new deans who started with me felt the same way.

One of the things I learned 10 years ago, that new deans now learn at the ABA's Velvet Boot Camp, is that the individuals who are selected for these demanding positions after going through those exhaustive searches and interviews are a great group of men and women. The deans I know are proof positive that you can be a good teacher, a productive scholar, an excellent law school citizen and a nice person—all at the same time! Moreover, I have, and have had, former deans as colleagues, and without exception they are excellent faculty members.

During the last ten years, I have enjoyed meeting and getting to know my fellow deans, and I look forward to seeing them at events like the AALS Recruitment Conference and the AALS Annual Meeting, as well as at the ABA's Deans' Workshop at the midyear meeting. What else has kept me at it for 10 years? Why have I taken on the challenge of leading a law school when I could be holding down the best job in higher education—being a tenured law professor.

Money? If you take this job because you are receiving a nice raise over your old academic year salary plus a summer teaching or research stipend, then you are making a big mistake. I am well compensated, but I earn every penny of it and there are plenty of times I say to myself, or to my wife, it is not enough!

Should you do it because you want to be in charge and tell people what to do? I hope not. Most of the time the buck stops in your office, and you will be expected to make all kinds of decisions, but you should never forget that leading a law faculty is often described as trying to herd or juggle cats. Your alumni, your students, the legislature, and the general public will assume that you have real authority and real power. On the other hand, if you are lucky your colleagues on the faculty might regard you at best as being first among equals.

Should you take this job because it will give you control over your time? You have to be kidding! A regular, tenured law professor is the master of his or her time, deadlines, and schedule. Those days of controlling your time are long gone once you become the dean. Your time is consumed by meetings at school, meetings across campus, travel to see alumni, travel to do development work, trying to prepare to teach a class, giving Rotary talks, speaking to bar groups, and doing a CLE once in a while. Deans should learn to "just say no!"

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So why have I been deaning for over 10 years? I do, in fact, enjoy most aspects of the job including the many challenges, the fact that there is nothing routine about the work, and the many public aspects of the position such as receptions, bar meetings, tailgate parties, law review banquets, and bar luncheons. I enjoy students. We would not have these wonderful jobs in law teaching without them. I like faculty and still think of myself as a law professor first. It is fun to do alumni relations and development work, and I would love to have more time on the road for friend raising and fund raising. Many of us who go into deaning are gregarious and outgoing people. As an extrovert, I have had the pleasure during my three deanships of getting to know and working with many interesting people. It is quite entertaining to sit at an alumni luncheon with a couple of recent graduates, some from the early '70s, and a senior attorney who finished school in the late 1940s, and listen to them talk about the law school, the practice of law, and their many experiences.

In order to tell you more about the personal side of my deanships, you need to know some family history. First, I am a faculty brat. My late father taught art and design at the University of Illinois for 40 years. He was Department Head for 20 of those years, and the department of art and design was, and is, big. I remember going to art department picnics as a child, having department receptions and parties at our house with my Mom keeping me out of the living and dining rooms for a week before the party, and having Mom and Dad going out in the evening to department and university functions. Dad served on all sorts of university committees, and Mom was active with several university organizations. They loved the University of Illinois, and they enjoyed being active and involved in the life of that campus. My parents remained in Champaign after Dad retired in 1979 and both kept going to art department and university functions until their deaths. They have had a huge impact on my career and on my approach to being a faculty member, a university citizen, and a dean. They are still my role models!

Second, notwithstanding my midwestern roots, I have spent all but one of my 23 years of law teaching in the Southeast. After practicing law in Providence, Rhode Island for two years, I moved to Columbia, South Carolina in the summer of 1977. I think Elvis died the day my U-Haul truck crossed the Mason-Dixon Line. I had to adjust to Columbia's heat and humidity and work hard to become a decent law teacher, but it did not take me too long to get hooked on BBQ, beach music, the low country, beautiful springs, and mild winters. The apple does not fall far from the tree, so I knew after less than a semester that I wanted to stay in teaching. Moreover, my wife, Jenny Coleman, helped transplant this Yankee to the Deep South. We married in 1980. Jenny is a South Carolinian, and she has a decorative ceramic tile on our kitchen wall that states: "American by Birth, Southerner by the Grace of God." Much to the distress of her mother, she kept her maiden name but in some of the places we have traveled during my deanships alumni think she has a double first name like Betty Jo or Mary Lou. She would be introduced "this is the Dean's wife, Jenny Coleman Shipley." Jenny deserves some kind of award or prize because she has been willing to go through three moves with me in the last 10 years! In fact, we spent a year apart on our last move from Kentucky to Georgia so our daughter could finish high school in Lexington and not have spend her senior year in a completely new environment. That was a tough year for all of us.

This gets into a third general point regarding my history and the personal side of my deaning. This is my third deanship. You might say fourth if you count my year as an Associate Dean at South Carolina, even though holding that kind of job (a mouse in training to be a rat) does not really prepare you for all the stuff you do as the Dean Dean. In any event, I was Associate Dean at South Carolina from 1989 to 1990, Dean at Ole Miss from 1990 to 1993, Dean at Kentucky from 1993 to 1998, and I have been at UGA since July 1, 1998. Tom Read and several other people have held more deanships than I, but my hunch is that I am the only person to hold that three deanships at different schools within the same athletic conference, the SEC. It is a good thing I like college football. Of course, it would have been difficult to grow up in a college town like Champaign Urbana and not be a college football and basketball fan.

How does all of this relate to the personal side of my deanships? I am fortunate that my wife has as much enthusiasm for the deaning business as I do. She is wonderful with alumni, she is super with students, she can work a crowd at a reception, she gets to know people, she likes to entertain, she gives excellent dinner parties, and she loves college football. In many ways, my wife is much like the girl who married dear old Dad: my Mother. Since Jenny arrived in Athens in the summer of 1999, we have had several groups of students to our house for dinner, we have had lots of faculty over, and we have entertained alumni at our home. My in-laws have made several visits too.

My wife has accompanied me on quite a few alumni/development trips. For instance, in the fall of 1999 we drove four hours on a Thursday morning for a luncheon in Statesboro, then on to a reception and dinner that evening in Savannah; we spent the night down the road in Brunswick, did a Friday breakfast there, drove to Jacksonville, Florida for UGA's annual moot court competition with the Florida Gators, as well as a luncheon with the judges and the sponsoring firms. The luncheon was followed by a general Jacksonville area alumni reception and dinner with a smaller group of alumni, and then on Saturday we went to the annual Georgia vs. Florida football game with some major donors. We were exhausted when we made the six-hour drive from Jacksonville back to Athens on Sunday, but we enjoyed lots of time together, we stayed in a very nice hotel in Jacksonville, and we had a chance to unwind and be ourselves. When we do this trip again we will build in time to play golf. Another example is the Georgia Bar's annual meeting. In the summer of 2000 the convention was in Savannah and Jenny was with me for a reception, several dinners with alumni, and two big alumni gatherings. We went over to Hilton Head after the last cocktail party to get some sun, walk on the beach, and lose some golf balls. It is fair to say that job has some good perks.

We try to balance out the deaning work and the public aspects of the position with time to ourselves and having some fun. It is not always easy. I have come to admire the endurance and resilience of political candidates after spending three or four days in a row visiting alumni, going to receptions, eating rich food, and not getting enough sleep. I always travel with my running gear so I can get in a workout every day, even if it is just fifteen laps around the Holiday Inn parking lot at six in the morning. That 30 minutes of pavement pounding clears my head and keeps me even tempered. Still, there are times when I wonder whether we can grip and grin any longer, and we do look forward to weekends when there is nothing going on. Also,

there are times we wish we could be anonymous. We lived in Oxford, Mississippi, a wonderful college town of 10,000, when I was dean at Ole Miss, and it seemed like everyone knew that I drove a 1981 Ford Fairmont station wagon. If I went to Wal-Mart on a Saturday unshaven and in blue jeans and a t-shirt, I would invariably run into people who would say "hey Dean, how are you?" You could not go out to dinner without seeing students and alumni. It was easier to escape in Lexington, Kentucky with a population of 250,000, but Athens, Georgia is more like Oxford. We need to be on good behavior all the time, but we like the familiarity, the friendliness, getting to know lots of people on campus and in the community, and seeing my students around the town.

The toughest thing about deaning for me, and this has not become any easier with experience, is needing to be an SOB once in a while and sometimes even more often than that. I think of myself as good-natured, upbeat, positive, and cheerful. I am a person who wants to be liked. There are, however, lots of times a dean has to say "no," or to have a confrontation, or to say "I am the Dean and that is the final decision." Is this harder to do when you are close to some of your colleagues? In my experience, no. I think it is easier for me to candid and direct with those colleagues who know me the best.

In conclusion, what has suffered the most during my ten years of being dean is not my marriage, my family, or my health, but my name. Everyone calls me Dean, and I have started to refer to myself as "the Dean," my wife as "the Deaness" and my daughter as "the Deanette." I do not know if I will ever be Dave Shipley again.