



## Reap a Harvest of Justice for All

by Bill Powers

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LET US NOT BECOME WEARY IN DOING GOOD, FOR AT THE  
PROPER TIME WE WILL REAP A HARVEST IF WE DO NOT GIVE UP.

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I'll be honest; there are times I feel overwhelmed with the responsibilities of the legal profession. I focus on my natural weaknesses, becoming consumed with the obstacles and opposition I face from sometimes not nice and/or good people.

Yes, there can be a distinction. Good people tend to be nice. If they are not nice, it is only for a time. And I honestly believe there are very few "not good" people out there.

In my heart, I know why it is all too easy to conflate not nice with not good. We see people at their worst in the pressure-cooker of the Judicial System.

- Clients need our help because something bad has happened
- Courts need to move dockets because of lacking resources and limited time
- Opposing Counsel's clients had something bad happen too

Even with the best of intentions to help others, I get derailed. There truly is so much work to be done and there is no way I can possibly do it all. There are many who need me. They drain me of my time, energy, and resources.

They also do not seem to appreciate what I do. "Thanks" is a word seldom heard. Courtesy, I fear, is rapidly becoming a thing of the past.

Many of us conceptually agree with the precept of Justice For All; but, actually living what you believe, fighting for and ensuring justice, is often inconvenient and most certainly, untimely.

It is easy to become exhausted . . . or weary.

I know, "Thanks a lot, Debbie Downer. As President aren't you supposed to build us up?" I believe I am . . . or will.

I want to talk to you, just you, in this President's Column. I want to ask some hard questions. It's just the two of us chatting. I'd appreciate your honesty. If you lie, you will be the only one who knows. We good?

**So let me ask you:**

**1. Why do you get this TRIAL BRIEFS magazine?**

Before you answer, I want you to think for a minute. Anyone can come up with an easy answer. As someone who is good on your feet—and you would not be an in-the-trenches courtroom lawyer if you were not—answers, especially obvious ones, should come easy.

**2. Do you drink too much? Do you have mental health problems?**

Whoa. What? Where did that come from? How dare you! That's a personal question. What business is it of yours? I am fine. I am just like everyone else out there. I'm good. Mind your own business.

### 3. Do you wonder whether Dental School is still an option?

No. I am proud of my work and my profession. I love what I do. I am making a difference in people's lives. I am exactly where I am supposed to be in life. Seriously, Bill, are you going to start talking about presidential things?



Again, I asked you to be honest with yourself. Right now you are deflecting. Let us start talking about some truths. Let us be honest with one another.

Let's make it a "Do Over."

We will ignore your first, visceral responses. The purpose of all this is not for me to get answers. I want you to get answers for and about yourself. You get to grade yourself. It's your test, but if it were me, I'd make it Pass or Fail.

I suspect I already know some of the Easy Answers. I hear them a lot, probably no louder than from myself. I want you to think about the Model Answers I propose.

1. Why do you get this TRIAL BRIEFS magazine?

Easy Answer:

I have been provided TRIAL BRIEFS magazine because I am one of 2,958 people in the State who paid membership dues to the North Carolina Advocates for Justice.

Model Answer:

I receive and read TRIAL BRIEFS magazine because I belong. I care about Justice in North Carolina. I want to be a better lawyer or legal professional. I want to help people. I want to become engaged. I want to make a difference. I believe in the Mission, the three pillars of NCAJ. I want to surround myself with excellence. I want to network. I want to enjoy the practice. I want others to enjoy their work too. I want to help build and grow the only organization in North Carolina that takes stands, that gets in the mix, and is comprised of truly good people who share not all, but many of my beliefs and passions. I know I will be valued. I know it does not matter what I look like. I know no one cares how I vote or who I love or in what God I believe or don't believe. I live what I believe and say. I understand there is room to improve, but there is a mighty tradition and history of excellence at NCAJ. I'm all in, 100 percent. What I do is more than a job. I am my job and the job is me. I get TRIAL BRIEFS because not only do I belong, but *I AM NCAJ*.

Then again, maybe you just pay the subscription price of membership.

2. Do you drink too much? Do you have mental health problems?

Easy Answer:

I'm good. Just like everyone else around me. I'm a normal lawyer. I've got a handle on things. Nothing controls me, especially my emotions.

Model Answer:

If I am honest with myself, this is something I should consider. I have seen mental health go south for some people I knew in law school. I heard someone in court isn't doing well. There are days I am tired. I get worn out. I am weary of the system, not all the time, but some of the time. I wish people would be a bit nicer, if not more professional. I wish people in power understood I do not control many things in court, if anything.

3. Do you wonder whether Dental School is still an option?

Easy Answer:

Again, I'm good. Everything is fine in the practice. I make plenty of money. I am satisfied. Could I really have gotten into Dental School?

Model Answer:

What I do for a living is tough. I live during a time when civility is a rarity. My profession and I are under attack. Thank goodness I have NCAJ.

### How'd You Do? Pass or Fail?

I hope you know you are valued at and a valuable asset to the Advocates for Justice. I also hope you recognize that it is okay to become weary. In fact, given the crazy time in which we live, we should expect to become so.

We will reap a harvest if we do not give up. We will change lives. We will make North Carolina a better place in which to live. We will comfort others when they are at their worst. We will make a difference.

And in so doing, we will live up to our highest ideals, justifying the blessing and honor we have been given to help others in need.

### What Are Our Wares?

We do not sell or trade tangible goods. Our wares are understanding, and patience, and compassion, and information, and experience, and advice.

We must continue our important work. We must press on towards the mark, knowing if we persist we will eventually reap the harvest of Justice for All.

That requires refueling.

That necessitates maintenance. We need rest.

The best place I know to go get sustenance when I am weary is NCAJ. I am recharged when I surround myself with people who understand me and like me, despite my many weaknesses.



I also recognize that I cannot always take. If I am “normal,” whatever that means today in our profession, I must help others whom feel the same way and need the same things I do.

Now that I think about it, I get recharged helping my fellow attorneys. At NCAJ, I do hear “thanks.” In fact, I hear it all the time.

The people at NCAJ appreciate the work I do. They are not mad that I seek what is written in the Constitution. They believe 100 percent in the concept of Justice and the necessity to maintain a civilized society.

They do not care if I am an R, or an D, or an I. They are my best and closest friends and confidants. They want me to succeed. They want me to be engaged.

They see value in who I am, even if we do not seem very much alike at first glance.

### So Here’s the Point . . .

We need you engaged. We need you 100 percent sold-out to our mission. Our greatest strengths are who we are and the purpose of our existence: To Help Others.

We need more people like you . . . and not like you. We want lawyers, and paralegals, and legal assistants from Greenville, and Greensboro, and Ahoskie, and Elizabeth City, and Oxford, and Cherokee.

We don’t care what you look like.

You can be young or well-seasoned by life. You can be an experienced trial dog or in possession of a license still wet from printing. You can litigate civil cases or defend people accused of crimes. You can be poor or rich. You can be garrulous or quiet.

We need more of you. We need more members. We need your help getting them.

We want to see you at Continuing Legal Education programs, Sidebar Socials, and Section Meetings. We want to hear what you think.

### Membership Is a Priority

Right now we are enjoying a slow uptick in membership. That’s good. We have an increased number of opportunities for people to get out a meet folks at Sidebar Socials, Section Meetings, and CLE.

Membership is central to just about everything in our organization. It affects our financial position, CLE attendance, our lobbying efforts, and our PAC participation.

It is not all rosy. Within the last few years, membership has been problematic at times. We cannot lose members. We cannot just maintain membership. We must grow if we are to reap our harvest.

Achieving a little bit of Justice, knowing we have a storehouse of need, somehow just doesn’t cut it.

During the second half of my term, membership is going

to be one of my top priorities. Please make it your priority too.

We need you to invite a non-member to the next NCAJ event you attend. They would see what great people comprise our organization and how dedicated they are to our causes.

I ask you to bring a membership application for your guest to complete and help us double our membership almost overnight. ***You can find an application at the back of this magazine.***

The event can be a Sidebar Social. Those are free and we normally have snacks.

It can be an CLE. Everyone needs some learnin’.

It also can be a Section Meeting. They might appreciate hearing what we do and why we’re doing it.

We challenge you. Can we double membership?

### In our Differences and Diversity, We Are Strong

These are not mere words or platitudes. We are taking action at the North Carolina Advocates for Justice.

Diversity and inclusion have always been important to us. We have not always been good about sharing what we do.

We have been talking about Diversity since the inauguration ceremony this past June. It is has been a regular topic of discussion at our Board of Governors meetings. We have participated in presentations, and meetings, and discussion on this issue. During the Board meeting at Mountain Magic, we took a hard look at our numbers.

Here is our conclusion: While we know diversity is important to us, we also know we have room to grow.

We have made it a priority for the North Carolina Advocates for Justice, from stem to stern, to consider diversity in everything we do. We need to be accountable to one another. Our members need to know of and understand our efforts.

Know this—as has been confirmed through an exhaustive review of our numbers:

Leadership in our organization meets or exceeds the metrics of our organization. Including Section Chairs, the Board of Governors, Professional Staff, and the Executive Committee, NCAJ represents who we are.

### That Is not Enough

We need diversity on our CLE panels. We need diversity at the highest levels of our Leadership. We need to get all kinds of people involved.

And while we may meet or exceed our membership statistics, it does not meet or exceed those of our profession and our communities.



As such, I have established the President's Diversity Task Force.

My friends Karonnie Truzy and Sarah Olson have agreed to serve as Co-Chairs. We are actively seeking options for training for the Board of Governors and the Executive Committee.

We are taking steps to make sure everyone feels included. This is a deliberative process. It will take time.

Executive Committee Member Jason Taylor recently emailed me, sharing what diversity meant to him:

*It is important to reiterate the unwavering purpose behind NCAJ. There is a constant, like our Constitution, that defines NCAJ and what we do and what we represent. We stand for the rights of the people, all people, regardless of race, gender, religion, political affiliation, sexual orientation or any other quality that makes us different from one another. These are the rights granted to us by our Constitutions and our Bill of Rights, and defended by us its protectors, in our actions and interactions with the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government.*

Jason traditionally votes Republican. He is as much part of NCAJ as any other member and he is dedicated to making certain you feel just as important and necessary to the success of our beloved organization.

We're on it. Please join us in the effort.

## The Prevalence of Substance Use and Other Mental Health Concerns Among American Attorneys

In February 2016 the *Journal of Addiction Medicine* published a report describing Substance Abuse and Mental Health issues among attorneys. Establishing itself as one of the most comprehensive studies to date, utilizing nationwide data, the results are troubling at best.

Of attorneys engaged in the practice of law:

- Twenty-one percent meet the description of a "Problem Drinker"
- Twenty-eight percent suffer from some level of depression
- Nineteen percent exhibit anxiety symptoms

The highest incidence of issues manifests itself within the grouping of "young" lawyers, defined as attorneys whom have practiced ten years or less.

The *Journal* surveyed 12,825 employed attorneys, evaluating alcohol and drug use, and also assessing symptomatology of stress, depression, and anxiety. The study results are shown below.

"Substantial" rates of behavioral health problems were found.

- Positive for Hazardous, Harmful, and Potentially Alcohol-Dependent Drinking (20.6%)
- Significant Levels of:
  - Depression (28%)
  - Anxiety (19%)
  - Stress (23%)

Younger age predicted higher frequencies of drinking and quantity of alcohol consumed.

According to the Study, "Attorneys experience problematic drinking that is hazardous, harmful, or otherwise consistent with alcohol use disorders at a higher rate than other professional populations. Mental health distress is also significant. These data underscore the need for greater resources for lawyer assistance programs, and also the expansion of available attorney-specific prevention and treatment interventions."

Here are some resources to know about:

### Stress, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Assistance BarCARES — Confidential, Free of Charge

Help in dealing with problems that might be causing distress or to identify resources for longer term assistance

BarCARES Coordinator: 919-929-1227 or 1-800-640-0735

<http://www.ncbar.org/members/barcares/>  
[www.barcares.org](http://www.barcares.org)

### NC Lawyer Assistance Program — Confidential, Free of Charge

Short-term counseling and crisis management, intervention assistance, assessments, referrals to outside resources (such as therapists and treatment centers), long-term aftercare case management and follow up, on-going support, or just a safe space to discuss your issues

Charlotte Area: 704-910-2310

[www.nclap.org](http://www.nclap.org)

I'd like to hear your ideas on how we can help address this issue. Please feel free to email me at [Bill@PowMac.com](mailto:Bill@PowMac.com) or call 704-342-4357.

We need to jump on this issue. Let's stop saying one thing, but doing nothing. Just Sayin'.

Bill Powers, I Am NCAJ. ♦

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Results: Substantial rates of behavioral health problems were found, with 20.6% screening positive for hazardous, harmful, and potentially alcohol-dependent drinking. Men had a higher proportion of positive screens, and also younger participants and those working in the field for a shorter duration ( $P<0.001$ ). Age group predicted Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test scores; respondents 30 years of age or younger were more likely to have a higher score than their older peers ( $P<0.001$ ). Levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among attorneys were significant, with 28%, 19%, and 23% experiencing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress, respectively.