

**Speech of Mr. Philip Dykes, SC  
Chairman of the Hong Kong Bar Association**

**At The University of Hong Kong  
Faculty of Law  
P.C.LL. Opening Ceremony 2018-2019**

**3 September 2018**

Dear Professor Hor, Members of Academic Staff, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I received the invitation to address you some weeks ago. It gave me great pleasure to receive it.

I have been asked to say some words of advice and encouragement to you as you begin yet another round in the brutal Darwinian contest to secure a legal professional qualification and, after that, employment as either a barrister or a solicitor or a government legal officer.

I will say the utterly predictable: work hard, go to lectures, listen and learn and try to get 8 hours sleep a night. It is so very true it is worth repeating with emphasis: work hard, go to lectures, listen and learn and try to get 9 hours sleep at night.

Those are necessary things to do but they are not sufficient if you hope to be a well-rounded lawyer-and I do not mean by that advice you should end up looking like me.

I mean that you should set aside some time for personal development. You will not be a good lawyer if all that you can do is speak of is the law to other lawyers.

At bottom, the law is all about persuasion. You have to persuade administrators, judges, professional colleagues, and, often the most difficult of all, clients that they should prefer an option that you offer to them over another rival one which might seem just as plausible and attractive.

You will not be good at persuasion if your discourse is confined to legal theory and practice. You will be, frankly, a bore. And a legal bore is the worst kind of bore, exemplified in what Dr Samuel Johnson, the English essayist and lexicographer, once said about a member of the legal profession. He said:

*“I do not care to speak ill of a man behind his back, but I believe he is an attorney.”*

Do not have that said of you.

You need to engage with society and, through engagement, be able to communicate with all kinds of people. You should aim at cultivating the common touch-which means showing sympathy and concerns for ordinary people and earning their respect. You should appear to be an interesting person but not at all remote.

How you choose to engage with others is up to you. You may devote a couple of hours a week to social activities that take you away from your fellow law students. Fellow students may be congenial company with whom you have a lot in common but they are not representative of society at large-thank goodness!

If you are not particularly sociable-and many lawyers are not, more is the pity-then engage through reading. Keep abreast with what is going on in society whether by keeping up with the news and current affairs by reading newspapers and journals critically.

Best of all is read well in your spare time.

Read history to know the future. A wise man once said that history is a vast early warning system and so it lets you anticipate things to come. That is a useful facility but does not extend to forecasting racing results at Happy Valley and Shatin.

Read good literature because reading good books is, like Rene Descartes said, a conversation with the finest minds of past centuries.

I leave the last word on the topic of getting your nose out of law books occasionally to the most successful novelist-not necessarily the best- in the nineteenth century, Sir Walter Scott.

He was a lawyer by training and held minor judicial office. He said:

*“A lawyer without history or literature is a mechanic, a mere working mason; if he possesses some knowledge of these, he may venture to call himself an architect.”*

Get your PCLL and go out and build the finest legal structures that you can but do not use the Central Library in Causeway Bay as an architectural metaphor or inspiration.

Second, cultivate and maintain independence-I mean by that your personal and professional independence, of course. I would not have HKU thought to be a second F.C.C., giving a platform for political deviancy.

Curiously, professional independence is built on a kind of noble servitude. You are the servants of the law, not your client or your employer. You will find that your professional rules will teach you that lesson and you must appreciate that that is their purpose; it is not to put obstacles in the way of professional development.

Without independent lawyers the edifice of the law will crumble because our judges need the support of men and women that will do what is right rather than what is expedient or convenient. The judiciary is indeed the third branch of government but is the weakest for it has no police force at its disposal to protect it, only conscientious and committed lawyers.

Maintaining independence may come at a personal cost. It certainly has in my case. But if you do not recognize that the Law is worth protecting even if there is some personal sacrifice, then you should be considering another profession or taking up a mere ‘job’.

With these few words, I wish you success in the following year and in the years to come.

Philip Dykes, SC  
Chairman  
Hong Kong Bar Association