

Margaret O'Mara Frossard Sees Professionalism As the *Essence of Success*

"I don't think ladies should be lawyers."

The message is framed and hung in the office of Justice Margaret O'Mara Frossard (ret.), as a reminder of one judge's attitude 40-plus years ago. Fortunately, she says, it no longer applies. And maybe that is because Frossard herself proved the judge wrong.

Frossard was one of just three women in her law school graduating class in 1976. She went on to have a distinguished career of more than 30 years in public service working as an assistant Cook County state's attorney, a judge in the Circuit Court of Cook County, and a justice of the Illinois Appellate Court.

Now she has set a new career path for herself. Outstanding students come to Frossard, associate dean of Professionalism and Career Strategy at The John Marshall Law School, looking for guidance on how to be ready for what the profession has to offer. They already have the legal knowledge and practical skills, but it is Frossard who gives them the polish they need to make the best impression to facilitate their path to success.

"I owe so much to Justice Frossard for all of the help she has given me, not only in my post-graduation job search last year, but also in continuing to serve as a guidepost as I near my second year of working in the practice of the law," says 2012 graduate Joseph Kearney. "I'm truly fortunate to know her." With her personal perspective from her years working in the legal profession, she helps students to become practice ready and to develop the skills of a true professional as they begin serving clients.

Through a series of special programs at John Marshall, Frossard is working diligently to help prepare students to succeed by stressing the importance of high ethical standards, the value of marketable skills and of mentorship.

"I don't think we can stress enough that what you have learned in the classroom and what skills you have acquired in an externship need to be complemented by a positive attitude and essential ethics. The whole package is what makes a graduate of John Marshall practice ready," she noted.

Shortly after Frossard arrived at John Marshall in spring 2011, her efforts led to the law school becoming the first to be approved by the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism to launch the Lawyer-to-Lawyer Mentoring Program. Since she set it in motion, Frossard has paired more than 100 mentors and mentees.

"I really see this as an essential step for new graduates. Mentorship is an important component for a new attorney's professionalism strategy. Having a one-to-one relationship helps new lawyers with the challenges presented by the first year of practice and it also helps them with networking."

"Justice Frossard always conveyed the importance of building relationships, but more importantly maintaining those relationships throughout your academic and professional career," said Michael Reeve, a 2011 graduate who serves as chief of staff to Rep. Ann Williams (D-Chicago).



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Two important components of Frossard's work are The Justice Anne Burke Professionalism Series, and the In-Classroom Professionalism & Engagement Program. Using her extensive collegial network, Frossard invites judges, practitioners, alumni and other professionals to serve as guest presenters for students. They discuss their own careers and explain how to achieve professionalism in the workplace, how to resolve ethical challenges, how to develop the skills valued by employers and how to market those skills. As a follow-up to this program, Justice Frossard recruits alumni to work toward job placement for recent graduates.

"Justice Frossard's alumni jobs network is a perfect example of her commitment to connecting people and ideas, instilling the importance of professionalism within students and alumni and tirelessly advocating on behalf of John Marshall job-seekers in this tough legal market," Kearney said.

Frossard accepts the compliment, but says she is delighted her initiatives are working to the benefit of John Marshall students.

"Many attorneys will move around within the profession finding the right job, the right specialty, the right firm or employer," she said. "They need to remember to include a big picture mentality in their decision-making that can help them strategize next steps after that first job, keeping in mind the importance of always strengthening their professional reputation.

"I know how anxious students are after graduating, passing the bar and getting that first position, but I want them to think beyond that."