

## TRIBUTE TO JOHN SEXTON

Like every other speaker tonight I have a story of how I met John Sexton. In April of 1993, a few weeks short of ten years ago, I met John at a lunch hosted for the Root-Tilden Scholars screening panels. That was my first year on the bench and I had been invited to chair one of the panels. John walked into lunch wearing what was clearly an often-worn baseball shirt over very-used blue jeans. Now, that was quite an image that the renowned Dean of the prestigious New York University Law School presented.

John began his remarks by apologizing for his casual clothing and explaining that he had been attending his daughter Katie's softball game, but that he simply could not let the day go by without thanking us for our contributions to the Root-Tilden Program.

Well, whatever passing questions his attire had initially raised in my mind, within minutes of hearing him speak I understood what made John the "Evangelist" and "dean of deans" others have described him to be.<sup>1</sup> His passion about NYU Law School, the Root-Tilden Program, its importance and contribution to legal learning and our individual importance to that process was simply inspiring. Inspiring enough that I have rarely missed serving as a Root-Tilden selection panelist in the last ten years and inspiring enough that I became an adjunct professor at the law school.

I have no reason to doubt that most people in this room can tell you similar stories of how John bewitched them into contributing to some NYU Law School led initiative. Sam Estreicher told me the other day that it is often said that a target of John's fund raising efforts should watch his or her pockets because the pockets will be empty when John leaves. I am sure NYU alumnus John Kern, who doubled the Root Tilden Program's endowment, will confirm Sam's observation.<sup>2</sup>

Sam also explained, however, that anyone, himself included, who is the target of John's discussion of an idea should watch his or her time because it will disappear into an unexpected, challenging and consuming commitment to implement and forge something new or to revitalize something old. That something new or that revitalization project always promotes and contributes to legal education, to the prestige of NYU Law School and to the sense of ac-

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1. Robert Walsh, *Advice from the New Dean's Boot Camp*, 34 U. Tol. Rev. 185, 188 (2002).

2. New York Law School, *Kern Awarded Vanderbilt Medal*, RTK News (Fall 2000).

complishment of the countless “volunteers” who joined and will continue to join John in his sometimes-seemingly quixotic but always successful endeavors.

John’s charisma, charm, energy, enthusiasm and passion are legendary; that is all you have heard about today from the other speakers. To me, however, John’s real brilliance is in taking ideas—some original, some suggested, some raw in form—and getting others to share his passion and to work to make the ideas into a reality. John inspires others joyfully to contribute completely, in whatever way they can, to bettering the world.

Since the other speakers have done such a wonderful job of describing John’s sense of family and how wonderful a friend he is, I will honor John today by describing what I see as the essence of John’s brilliance—his ability to inspire and snare others to make real John’s vision. John’s deanship tenure at NYU Law School provides countless examples of such magic. I mention only a few projects as illustrative of my point but no one should assume that any project not mentioned is any less important in value.

Norman Dorsen has told me he has never forgotten John’s call in October 1993 suggesting they get together to discuss two of John’s newest ideas. The first was a money-making venture in which Norman was not interested. The second, however, was in an area in which Norman had previously had no interest but which sounded intriguing nonetheless. John proposed the idea of forming a global legal education program.

Norman’s interest was peaked and John immediately recruited Norman to sell the idea to the faculty. Having accomplished that task and having conveniently managed to convince Norman of the importance of the project—because how can you sell what you don’t believe in—John asked Norman to head the project.<sup>3</sup>

John also later convinced Rita and Gustave Hauser to fund the creation of NYU’s world premier legal scholarship program for foreign students.<sup>4</sup> The enormous success of the Hauser Global Law School Program and its integration into the very fabric of NYU’s teaching structure is well known. My point simply is that John’s innovative idea co-opted Norman’s enormous energy and the Hausers’ generosity to launch one of the newest and most creative education projects of the last ten years. The Global Law School is an international program of law far exceeding the reach and im-

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3. New York Law School, *Hauser Global Law Program Renamed*, 9 *GlobaLaw* (Spring 2002).

4. *Id.*

2004]

TRIBUTE

25

pact in legal learning that traditional programs in international law have ever accomplished.

In a similar vein, Sam Estreicher tells me that for nearly 40 years the Institute of Judicial Administration had been housed at NYU Law School, but that its full integration within the law school had not occurred. In 1991 and 1992, John convinced Sam and Ken Starr, the then Director of the Institute, that a new approach needed to be undertaken. That prodding and the creative sparks of Sam and Ken, ignited by John's continuous support and finding of a contributor to the revitalization program, launched the Institute into its current role as a preeminent program for educating federal and state judges.

Finally, Tony Amsterdam would undoubtedly tell you that John supported and nurtured his vision of integrating lawyering, public service and clinical work throughout a student's educational life and that in large measure that is why NYU became the first law school to add lawyering to a student's first year program.<sup>5</sup>

Now everyone in this room should know that money does not buy you a fifth place ranking in US World & News Report. John Sexton figured out, however, that following through with ideas—whether his own or adopted and reshaped from others—buys you the ranking because implementing vision motivates not just the giving of money, but the giving of time and effort by the people around you.<sup>6</sup>

John has described lawyers, functionally, as communicators, and he has expressed the belief that to communicate you need to listen first.<sup>7</sup> John has proven his point by example. By careful listening, John has taken the drive, energy and good will of others and given them a multitude of platforms in which new ideas and new approaches to teaching and learning have flourished, not only in the programs I have described but in the many others like the colloquia seminars organized by faculty and students and the ground-breaking work of the Brennan Center, all of which John has had the vision to support and encourage.

Vision is a scarce commodity in the world. John possesses the heart and soul to understand that vision requires the work of many to become a reality. This understanding is the essence of greatness. John Sexton exemplifies greatness and I can think of no better a

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5. Linda Hirshman, *A Woman's Guide to Law School* 29 (1999).

6. US News and World Report, *America's Best Graduate Schools 2004*, at [http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/rankings/law/brief/lawrank\\_brief.php](http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/rankings/law/brief/lawrank_brief.php).

7. John Sexton, "Out of the Box" *Thinking about the Training of Lawyers in the Next Millennium*, 33 U. Tol. L. Rev. 189 (2001).

26 NYU ANNUAL SURVEY OF AMERICAN LAW [Vol. 60:23

person for this Review to honor today. I count myself fortunate to be considered a friend by him. Thank you, John.

SONIA SOTOMAYOR  
Judge  
United States Court of Appeals  
for the Second Circuit