

**Remarks of Richard Revesz at the Memorial Service for Lester Pollack
December 11, 2015**

I didn't really know Lester well when I became dean of NYU Law School in 2002. I had seen him previously at some Law School events and had talked to him briefly once or twice, but I was then a relatively young faculty member and he sat on Mount Olympus as chair of the Law School board. But on the day when my appointment was announced, Lester told me that from then on we'd be having breakfast every two weeks at the Regency Hotel and discussing the affairs of the Law School. And even after Lester stepped down as chair, we continued having breakfast together at the Regency, almost as frequently, until his health unfortunately took a turn for the worse, and Vicki and I began visiting him in his apartment instead.

Having breakfast with Lester at the Regency was quite an education. After a few times, I realized that Lester always sat at the same table, that there was a pecking order for tables, and that Lester's was the best one. That was an impressive accomplishment, because the second- and third-best tables were assigned to the people who, literally, owned the place.

Lester's central role in that world was further underscored by the fact that at one time the Regency's breakfast menu had a dish named after him. The menu had changed by the time I started meeting with Lester, but I always wondered what the Lester breakfast entrée might have been like, and regret that I never asked him.

Almost every time we got together, a steady stream of good wishers would pass by Lester's table and pay their respects to him. During these breakfasts, I met major Israeli politicians and academic leaders, American Jewish leaders, Democratic leaders at the national, state, and local levels, Republican cabinet members, and candidates for various high offices. Practically every one of these individuals, after exchanging some words with Lester, would turn to me and say: "You are having breakfast with a great man." Which, of course, I knew I was.

Lester's management style was remarkable. Even though he came from the world of finance and not from academia, he took enormous interest in the academic life of the Law School. He wanted to know about the ins and outs of faculty hiring and was delighted at the accomplishment of our students. He cared deeply about what we were doing in the Law and

Business area and eventually established the Lester Pollack Center for Law and Business, a joint venture between the Law School and the Stern School at NYU.

But meetings with Lester were far more than me briefing him on the goings on at the Law School. He gave incredibly wise direction, but did so in the most gentle of ways. During the six years in which Lester was the chair of the board and I was the dean of the Law School, I don't think that he ever told me not to do something I wanted to do. But he would sometimes say: "let's think about that some more," or "let's talk about it again next time we get together."

Lester's hesitation always gave me pause. I knew that he had the institution's best interests in mind. And Lester had a truly remarkable understanding of the Law School. He had Founding Father status as a result of his role in designing the Law School's modern governance structure in the 1970s, which made possible a remarkable institutional transformation that turned NYU Law School into a leading institution. Lester was our George Washington, our Thomas Jefferson. (When I once told him that, he said that it made him sound old.)

I also knew that Lester was an enormously savvy man with unusually broad experience. He had led some of our nation's most important business entities. As Executive Vice President of Loews Corporation, he played such a central position that he had been referred to in a *New York Magazine* article as "the third Tisch brother," alongside Larry and Bob. (Lester liked that reference.) He had also been Vice Chairman and co-Chief Operating Officer of United Brands, and had sat on the boards of American Seafoods, CNA Financial, Loews, Paramount Communications, Polaroid, Sun America, among other major corporations. Lester was also a leader of the financial services industry, having been a Founding General Partner of Odyssey Partners, and then the Founder and Chairman of his own venture, Centre Partners. And Lester was a leader of the not-for-profit world, having served as chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and honorary chair of the Anti-Defamation League, as well as chair of NYU Law School's board and a trustee of New York University, among many other significant organizations.

So, if Lester appeared to have reservation about something I was thinking about doing, I definitely wanted to consider the issue more

carefully. And when Lester and I met again, one of two things would generally have happened. In some cases, I would have a better justification for what I thought we should do. And in others, I had concluded that maybe doing what I originally had in mind was not such a good idea after all.

I don't think that Lester was an expert in federal administrative law. But he was better than any court I'm familiar with at practicing "hard look review," a technique developed in the early 1970s, long after Lester had graduated from law school. Under the doctrine, reviewing courts require federal administrative agencies to explain in detail the basis for their decisions. This technique can definitely lead to better decisions. But it can also be an instrument for inaction and delay. That's the tradeoff. Lester invariably struck the right balance; the courts frequently don't. Lester led subtly, and extremely effectively.

While Lester was a titan of business, meetings with him were about far more than just business. Lester had very expressive eyes and there was always a twinkle when he talked about Geri's work on the board of American Friends of the Israel Museum or of other institutions and when he talked about his grandchildren's weekend sports activities, which regularly

took Lester and Geri to playing fields in Westchester County and in Pennsylvania. And, similarly, he took a deep interest in my family, which I appreciated a great deal.

One of the last times that Lester came to the Law School, almost 60 years after entering as a first-year student in 1954, was for the unveiling of my portrait as I was stepping down as dean in May 2013. It was extraordinarily meaningful to me that he made this effort despite the obvious physical challenges that he was facing by then. (And to the end, he faced these challenges with enormous grace and Geri was extraordinary in providing a wonderful loving environment as Lester struggled with his illness .) When I think back on the day of my portrait ceremony, I have a very vivid image of three people in wheelchairs sitting by the aisle in the front rows, one behind the other. They were Lester, my mother, and Judge Wilfred Feinberg, for whom I had clerked. Each of them had played a very important role in my life, as a parent, or as a quasi-parental figure. (My own father had died when I was eight years old.) Lester was the last surviving member of this trio and for me his passing marks the end of an era.

But, more importantly, I believe that Lester's passing marks the approaching end of an era of greater general significance. There was a time when great men in New York City (I guess at that time the ones who were recognized were almost all men) could be called on to solve significant crises and rescue significant institutions, from New York City itself to New York University. Lester was one of them. Lew Rudin and Larry Tisch, who predeceased Lester, were others. Thankfully, Marty Lipton and Felix Rohatyn are still active. Notably, all of them were Lester's friends.

Now, it seems more difficult for people to rise above the fray and be perceived as fair by disparate groups. Politics are more acrimonious. There is greater distrust in the world. I have the sense that if the matter had come up a decade earlier, Lester would have figured out a way to avert the controversy over Prime Minister Netanyahu's appearance before a joint session of Congress earlier this year, and that he would have done so in a way that would have satisfied the competing interests. Lester knew how to broker a deal that everyone could live with because he could understand and empathize with all the relevant interests. He was a good listener and he inspired trust.

Over the last year, I've spent many full days chairing meetings of the American Law Institute in the Lester Pollack Colloquium Room, on the top floor of Furman Hall at NYU Law School. We deal with some of the most controversial issues of our time: the criminal law of sexual assault, the adjudication of sexual misconduct claims on college and university campuses, the conduct of police investigations. Sometimes, the competing positions are stated in such categorical terms that it is hard to imagine that an appropriate consensus could ever be reached. During those times, I look up at the wonderful portrait of Lester's that dominates the room. He has a gentle smile and an expression that inspires confidence that a good path forward will emerge. I know that for years to come, I'll continue to derive strength and optimism from Lester's reassuring gaze.

With Lester's passing, NYU Law School lost one of its transformational leaders. Lester's imprint is now everywhere: in the institutional arrangements that made our success possible; in the Pollack Center, which so interested him; in the Pollack Colloquium Room, where some of our most important conversations take place; and in the values and perspectives of those of us who had the privilege to know him well and to work with him closely.

Lester, you were my cherished mentor and my very good friend. I
will miss you greatly!