

Congratulations, You're a Great Lawyer—and You're Not a Jerk

By Jenna Greene

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The legal world is full of lists and rankings. I should know, I help compile some of them. But there's one honor that stands apart: the American College of Trial Lawyers.

Being a member amounts to a stamp of approval from your peers that not only are you an excellent lawyer, you're also not a jerk.

Over the weekend, the group inducted 115 new fellows at its annual meeting in Philadelphia.

Founded in 1950, the college limits membership to no more than 1 percent of the total lawyer population in any state or Canadian province. There are currently about 5,700 fellows, including all the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court and the Supreme Court of Canada.

You don't get invited to join because your law firm put together a snazzy packet of nominating materials. If anything, that might work against you.

Rather, you get selected by your peers. Not your partners—they can't nominate you, second your nomination, participate in the discussion about you or even vote to admit you.

The nod comes from all the other lawyers you've crossed paths with.

As past president Francis Wikstrom, a partner at Parsons Behle & Latimer in Salt Lake City told The Lit Daily last year, "The truly outstanding and collegial trial lawyers will be noticed and nominated," he said.

"The three essential qualities for fellowship are outstanding trial skills, collegiality and civility, and impeccable ethics," he continued. "We recognize that there are lawyers who may be skilled at trial but who treat others poorly. Those lawyers will never be invited to become fellows."



Heidi Hubbard

It's not just talk. The nominees are investigated, with judges that they've appeared before asked to submit confidential evaluations; and opposing counsel too. Every fellow in the jurisdiction is polled to get their opinion. All this is before the final vote, where two-thirds of the members must say yes.

In an era where so many lawyers bemoan the decline of civility in the legal profession, kudos the college for making it count.

Williams & Connolly partner Heidi Hubbard also has plenty of colleagues from her firm who are members—at least 10 other lawyers from the D.C. powerhouse are fellows, but so far, she's the only woman.

"It's a great honor to be included with such a talented group of trial lawyers, and I'm proud to be the first of what I expect will be a long line of women inductees from my firm," she said.

Hubbard co-chairs Williams & Connolly's products liability, torts and medicine practice group.

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