

Chicago Lawyer

An International Perspective: There is a 'we' in lawyer

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As the pain of Ghana's quarterfinal loss in the 2010 FIFA World Cup slowly began to ebb last month, my mind was finally able to return to being a lawyer. For three weeks I cheered, shouted, and even blubbered as I watched my team of countrymen battle for World Cup glory. Although my passion for football (read: soccer) and this year's World Cup was not unknown to the partners at my firm, the control it had over my thoughts, and billable hours, throughout the month of June was. Ironically, merely days after I sobered from my World Cup hangover, I was cheering on another team, as I was called up to help the lawyers in my firm prepare for a trial.

While our time in law school can best be analogized to an individual sport, for most of us, our time practicing law is synonymous to a team sport.

For lawyers who work for law firms, our days are spent working alongside other lawyers within our firm to represent and advocate the interests of our clients. Even for those lawyers who practice alone, consulting other lawyers for advice or working with other lawyers when cases are too large for them to handle alone is a daily occurrence. But as united as we are within our firms, outside of our ornate office buildings our collective ethos is harder to recognize, as each of us cheer different ideals and argue to change society in different ways.

Unlike doctors or even investment bankers, defining the creed of lawyers is a head scratcher - but should it be?

Although our clients determine the cases we work on and the sides we represent, lawyers still retain the ability to pick sides and decide whether or not they want to advocate the change their clients seek to effect. Yet this is where our profession seems to stand divided, as lawyers both within our societies and outside fight against each other to bring about change, even when it would seem that society or people's basic human rights would be harmed by that change.



The U.S. Supreme Court's recent ruling in *McDonald v. Chicago* illustrated this, as lawyers persuaded the U.S. Supreme Court to strike down a Chicago ordinance banning handgun ownership.

For many lawyers, the ruling was nothing short of a travesty of justice, despite the constitutional basis for the ruling. For other lawyers though, the ruling was fair and necessary, despite the threat that handgun ownership poses to communities across the United States.

At the same time, across the Atlantic in France, lawyers geared up for a similar kind of legal battle, as a new law banning Muslim women from wearing their traditional burka, a face-covering veil, in public was recently passed.

The penalty for women seen exercising their freedom of religion in this way is a \$125 fine and being sentenced to take "citizenship classes." To many lawyers in France, the new law is discriminatory and a threat to human dignity. For other lawyers, however, this law is also necessary.

Prior to attending law school, I believed that fundamentally all lawyers worked together for the same common goal. Much like doctors who strive to prevent disease and cure those of us who are sick, or even the much maligned investment bankers who simply strive to make as much money as possible. For some lawyers, this is the case - prosecutors and defenders for instance. But for the rest of us, whether here or in countries like France, identifying the common goal that we work toward is not so easy.

Fortuitously, a recent trip to federal court provided me with the ending to this column. Sitting in court awaiting our case to be called for oral argument, I sat quietly confident. I had spent five days drafting the motion for summary judgment, and felt that the judge would rule in our favor, particularly given the implausibility of the plaintiff's allegations. Across from us, however, opposing counsel sat unwavering.

As I sat and listened to her argue her case to the judge, I found myself incredulous at the fact that she actually believed in her client and was pursuing this cause of action. Then came the light-bulb moment. Whether she was arguing for a check, or arguing because she actually believed in her clients' claims, I realized that her mere decision to argue was ensuring that her client's allegations received the fair treatment that they deserve, even if to me they seemed absurd. This, I told myself, is our ethos.

Although our agreement to disagree may create the illusion of a divided profession, each of us works together for the same goal.

Much like each of the teams at this year's World Cup, our ambition is to win our cases, whether because we believe in our clients' cause of action or simply seek to obtain the best outcome.

Without our constant clashing in the playing fields of our courthouses, however, our society would remain oppressive and static. Our ethos to agree to disagree while playing fairly and abiding by the rules ensures that our clients' cases are afforded due process. As long as we are doing this, I suppose our team is winning.

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