

The Florida Bar News

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FORMER BAR PRESIDENT Edward Blumberg, President Bill Schifino, and President-elect Michael Higer participate in a Dade County Bar program promoting professionalism.

Professionalism and civility on display in South Florida

The Dade County Bar presented a recent seminar, "Climb the Pillars to Success by Fitting Professionalism into the Profession," featuring a keynote speech by Florida Supreme Court Justice Fred Lewis, the author of the Supreme Court's opinion that established Florida's Code of Professionalism and the Florida Circuit Professionalism Panels.

Justice Lewis was joined by 11th Judicial Circuit Chief Judge Bertila Soto and Circuit Judges Stanford Blake (ret.), Jorge Cueto, Ellen Sue Venzer, Scott Bernstein, Thomas Rebull, and Miguel de la O, who spoke about the development and implementation of the statewide and local professionalism rules, and the progress of the professionalism panels operating in each Florida judicial circuit.

The faculty for the seminar also included Florida Bar President Bill Schifino, President-elect Michael Higer, past President Edward Blumberg, and Bar Board of Governors Member Leslie Lott, and presidents of voluntary bar organizations and bar leaders who traveled from around the state to promote a new approach to professionalism and civility among lawyers.

The topics included practical solutions to common professionalism issues (tactics for dealing with the "power players"); the unsustainability of rudeness and

incivility in the life of a lawyer (emphasizing the negative personal impact on lawyers who act unprofessionally); exposing the fallacy that aggressive tactics demonstrate legal ability or achieve results (unprofessional behavior is bad lawyering and tends to achieve poor results); the power of professionalism in elevating one's credibility with judges (judges rely on credibility in making discretionary rulings); civility as a practical tool to establish and improve ones relationships with opposing counsel (leading to better results and career advancement); and understanding and handling subtle forms of discrimination in the legal profession (implicit bias affects everyone and holds us all back).

DCBA Board Member Bradley Trushin, who was recently appointed to the Florida Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism, produced the seminar because he said many Florida lawyers are not aware that the Florida Supreme Court has established mandatory professionalism rules and a mechanism for ensuring compliance. The seminar, he said, was designed as a first step in creating a new paradigm in which professional behavior is universally expected among lawyers, and lawyers zealously protecting the integrity of their profession.