

Opening Remarks
by
William Ray Price, Jr.,
Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Missouri
at
The Missouri Bar Annual Meeting,
St. Louis, Missouri

September 21, 2000

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first-year associates, all here in Missouri. Our practices are becoming more and more specialized and brutal efficiency is being forced upon us by clients and competitors, competitors both within and without the legal profession. In many ways, I am certain that we are providing our clients a higher quality of service for a lower relative cost than ever before. But at what price?

I cannot tell you how often I've heard the lament that "the practice of law just isn't fun anymore". Whether from big firm or small, rural or urban, everyone seems to say that they would rather have the practice the way it was 20 years ago, than the way it is now. Of course, I heard the same thing back in 1978, when I began to practice law and, of course, that comment misses the point as badly now as it did then.

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I don't mean to say that the economics of the practice can be ignored. They cannot. Lawyers must earn a living commensurate with their skill and work. If we cannot provide value relative to our cost, both actual value and perceived value, our clients will find solutions outside of the traditional legal system. To assume otherwise is simply naïve. Whatever our type of practice, these are realities that will drive us, as they

have driven every other segment of our economy. The beauty and the challenge of a free market system is that no one is guaranteed success; we each must earn it day by day.

We cannot bury our heads in the sand and refuse to keep pace with the world around us. In our heads, we must continually strive to be competitive and efficient. But, our hearts must be different. They must yearn for and serve justice. Our greatest danger as lawyers is if we confuse these two demands.

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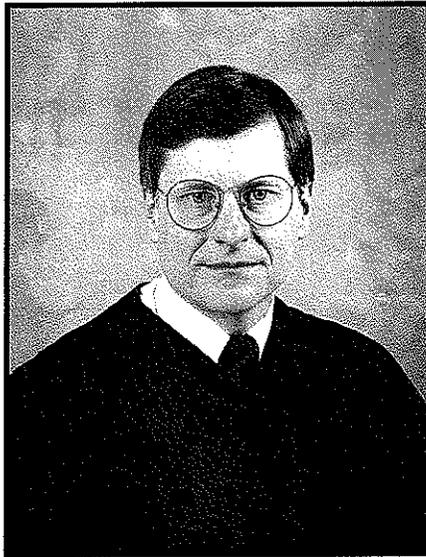
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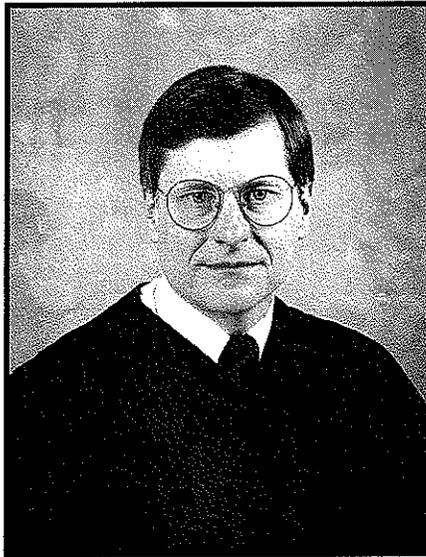
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