

**Ms. Isabelle Thibault's Comments on Professor Heminway's
Presentation**

My name is Isabelle Thibault and I am a 3L here at the University of Tennessee College of Law. Thank you, Professor Heminway and Professor Sennett, for getting us started, and thank you to the Transactions staff for inviting me back again and for all the hard work they have put into this event. I would bet that each member of the team has put great effort—or I suppose it may come naturally to some—into their relationships with the students and professors all speaking today. Good enough relationships to invite professors to speak, to ask professors and students to comment, and for the invitees to be willing to accept. I would like to hone in on a very specific point made in the prior presentations. Professor Heminway mentioned that “The multiple levels of relationships that must be identified, understood, considered, cultivated, and employed underscore the importance of a range of interpersonal leadership traits, skills, and practices to business lawyering.”

Utilization of these skills is expected in business associations and transactions, emphasized in the Code of Conduct, and expected from the lawyer as a professional. And the importance of these skills is not lost on law schools. Particularly, navigating the dynamics of law school can be a challenging test in interpersonal skills. Confronted with varying political views, cultural backgrounds, professional expertise, administrative experience, and ideas about what should be done, the active and involved

law student can find themselves in a penumbra of learning experiences. My personal experience in lawyering relationships and leadership has developed largely from law school—serving on executive boards, leading an organization as President, participating in group projects and even debriefing with other classmates of mine who hold leadership positions.

Whether these experiences are positive or negative, depends centrally on the relationship of the parties, which in turn depends greatly on the interpersonal skills of the individuals. On a hierarchical level: Are you peers, members of the same executive board? Is one subordinate to the other? Is one relying on the other? On a personal level: Do you know this person? Are you friends? Are they a complete stranger? I have found that the latter is more important. And people with the best relationships will have a more positive experience every time. This is because in a familiar relationship there is a deeper sense of trust, an increased willingness to listen and understand, and more comfort in challenging the other person's views. This is why you can argue and debate with your friends and why you trust mentors with knowledge about your personal life.

Leadership skills, whether you are aware of them are not, are integral to these relationships. Your clients will see you as a leader in the sense that they are dependent on you for your legal help and knowledge. Business

partners may rely on you as someone with insight into different business aspects, colleagues will look to you as a teammate and maybe a leader on a specific matter. In writing for the Institute of Professional Leadership earlier this year I focused largely on knowing one's role and noted that: "Once people find your words as a leader to be meaningless or once they start to feel like you are just going through the motions, you've lost them." You don't want to lose you clients, colleagues, or really any other connections—especially in a field where relationships and connections build professional successes. The point is relationships are fundamentally important for lawyers and thus lawyers need to have developed strong interpersonal skills.

People who have the best relationships are good, active listeners, they can pick up on emotional cues and body language, and they ensure their relationships are not one-sided. From clients, to colleagues, to business partners, to clerks and judges, the lawyer is going to have to maintain good relationships with each one, and law schools have largely embraced this concept and integrated it into the law school environment. Holding a leadership position in any number of student organizations, joining committees with faculty members, being involved in a journal, writing for the Institute of Professional Leadership, taking clinic courses, and even taking various classes will expose the law student to opportunities to practice interpersonal skills like teamwork, collaboration, precise decision making,

effective communication, public speaking, and situational awareness, among others. Of course, the effectiveness depends largely on how involved a given individual chooses to be, and certainly, everyone develops these skills naturally growing up in the world (maybe a limited exception for Covid babies)—but law school in particular exposes students to situations where they can use and develop these skills, specifically in an arena with professionals with whom they will spend their careers and situations specific to lawyers, who are generally seen as *de facto* leaders in a group.