

A not-so-well-known fact about Lincoln is that he did not like impromptu speaking. He preferred to think about and carefully draft his speeches. So do I.

Please allow me to begin by humbly thanking you for choosing me to be the recipient of the ALA Judicial Civic Education Award for 2018. I can assure you that it is one of the greatest and warmest honors I have had in my life. Thank you so very much.

If you are going to be active in the Law Related Education (LRE) field, you are going to be away from home in schools or at meetings. And then when you are home, you are going to spend a lot of time preparing to teach law. So I want to thank my wife, Jeanine, for not only enduring but encouraging me to do this work.

I have been asked to share a few thoughts with you about my involvement with LRE. In that vein, I would like to quickly share ten musings in ten minutes regarding my 35 years working for Law-Related Education.

1. My interest in LRE began in middle school when a lawyer agreed to coach my mock trial team. I have fond memories of that competition, so when I was asked to coach a mock trial team in my first years of law practice I readily agreed. That eventually led to my volunteering for the LRE committee of the State Bar which ran the mock trial competitions, which led to my becoming its chair, which led to serving as liaison on the Michigan Center for Civic Education which eventually led to my becoming its current president and instrumental in our most current project to host the National Mock Trial competition in the next few years.

A professional lifelong commitment to LRE simply because someone in my life took the time to volunteer for an LRE activity when I was in middle school. Pay it forward.

2. The LRE Golden Rule. Teachers have a finite period of time to teach an ever increasing list of things so when they share their classroom time with you it is a gift, of pure gold, treat it as such. Be ready with an interactive high energy educational program and entertain and educate those students as promised.

3. In my first year of law school, my father taught me a maxim. Interestingly, it is a lesson he learned in his first year of law school and for a similar reason – we both performed poorly in one of our first-year law classes. And we both began to question if the law was our career. At the time a professor who saw my father's potential told him "Lowe – Good Law Is Just Good Common Sense".

My father grabbed onto that rule and applied it throughout his better than 50 years of law practice. He taught it to me when I stumbled in law school. Like him, I have applied that maxim all my legal career and now those words are painted on the soffit above my bench in the courtroom.

When students visit the courtroom I point to that rule and say, "I will prove it". I then ask them if they had been arrested last night and brought to the court for the first time this morning, for what we call the arraignment, what would they want to know?

Working together they come up with: 1. What am I being accused of? 2. What are the possible penalties? And 3. What are my rights?

I then inform them that Michigan law requires a judge to tell a person at their arraignment precisely those three things. I follow up by pointing out that a bunch of students who had never been to law school had just figured out what the law should be by using simple common sense. That's good law.

4. Why do I use storytelling in my LRE programs? Because the power of storytelling is just as real as it was when Jesus Christ walked the earth and told parables. Those parables are still told today, and not just by Christians. And they still teach the lessons they taught then.

Storytelling can communicate virtually any point you want to make and can do so in a manner that those listening may not immediately realize you have educated them and possibly even indoctrinated them to your views on life.

I believe that is the very reason why Lincoln was a storyteller.

Now you do not need to become Lincoln like I do when I tell stories of his childhood and his life as a lawyer. You just need to read and learn stories about Lincoln and share them. Along the way, you sneak in a lesson or two.

For instance, watch the lights go on when you tell of how he lived in a log cabin (a fact that many of them already know). Then follow up by pointing out that in 1809 when Lincoln was born 80% of the population in the United States lived in log cabins. What does that mean today? If you are one of the 90% of the kids in this country living in a house, condo or apartment you can grow up to become president, just like Lincoln did.

5. The Bermuda Triangle of LRE Frustration. Know this in advance: If you are going to do LRE there will be frustrations.

- The administrators, teachers, and lawyers doing the LRE programs will come and go. And therefore, unfortunately, so do the LRE programs they supported because when they leave their replacement may not share their interest or commitment to LRE. That will be really frustrating.

- LRE programs themselves tend to come and go. Sometimes they get replaced by better programs. But sometimes they get replaced because the new programs come with grants or free materials. Because, as we all know, dollars for LRE programs also come and go. You will lose programs because the programs themselves or the dollars that support them disappear. That will be really frustrating.

- The leaders serving on your State and local School Boards, State Legislatures, and Federal legislatures also come and go. When the players voting in those entities change so will that entities commitment to LRE. That will be really frustrating.

One of the drawbacks of being involved in LRE for 36 years is that I have faced all these frustrations, some more than once. My advice. Kick the desk, take a breath, and

start again. Build where you can. Call on those who understand. In Michigan, that means entities like the Michigan Bar Association, and the Michigan Center for Civic Education, which have committed money, time and effort toward LRE and are some of our greatest allies. Endure the losses you must. And yes that is really frustrating.

6. But sometimes the frustration reaches an uber level.

In the State of Michigan, there is yet another debate taking place about the value and place for civic education in our public school systems. This is uber frustration.

Because you can understand and comprehend the causes of the Bermuda Triangle of LRE ...but this one...

To Churchill, it would be “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.”

Humphrey Bogart would simply make the observation that he did while captaining the African Queen “things are never so bad that they cannot be made worse”.

It is stunningly frustrating whenever you run into a leader in your community, state or this country who simply cannot grasp the concept, that just as any product you purchase today, comes with an owner’s manual, which you should read before using the product, so did this country. Yes, the owner’s manual I am speaking about is the Constitution of the United States.

So it is uber frustrating that we are constantly having to convince or re-convince the powers that be that this country’s owner’s manual should be taught so that we can instill in every youth today an understanding of their valuable role in the tomorrows of our country.

If you fail to read the owner’s manual and use the product incorrectly you might void the warranty. If enough of us fail to know the Constitution we may lose the freedom’s it protects.

7. Because Lincoln was right when he said: “The philosophy of the school room in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next.” Sometimes when I watch or read about the folks that rule and/or the media that cover them I pause and ask myself “Did you skip civics class?”

It is disappointing to be reminded by these leaders of the purpose of our work almost daily. That so many folks in government or the media that cover government do not understand some of the most basic lessons we teach elementary school kids in our LRE programs.

And yet those who rule appear to be constantly undermining our ability to teach the basics of our government by defunding or removing the topic from the list of mandatory subjects in our schools.

If we give the kids no reason to think it is important when they are at an age we can make an impression why should we think that someday they will come to the conclusion that knowing the Constitution is important?

I have to get off of my soapbox now.

Before doing so allow me to thank the ALA. It has been said, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good people do nothing."

So please accept the appreciation of judges like me, all over America, doing law-related education, for the work done by the American Lawyers Alliance and your vision towards "nurturing the rule of law for freedom's sake".

Clearly, you are some of the good people who are unwilling to allow evil to triumph.

8. Have fun and try hard to make it fun for those you are teaching. I have no statistics to support this but it has been my experience that people enjoying themselves learn more.

9. Which brings me to the next to last lesson. A maxim that can be applied to anything you know that you want to pass on to another. Unashamedly I call it Lowe's Maxim. "Education leads to understanding and understanding leads to appreciation. I cannot fairly expect you to appreciate anything that I am unwilling to take the time to educate you about."

In the seventies, the Michigan Bar Association, based upon studies, adopted the philosophy that the best way to make an indelible mark on the minds of children with LRE was to create a partnership of a teacher, lawyer, and classroom. It was called the TLC Program.

The key was that the lawyer would visit the class once a month for the whole school year. It was also necessary that the lawyer not just be a talking head. The programs had to be interactive. Canned programs were created and distributed to participating Michigan lawyers.

The students came away with an appreciation, not just for the law, but get this, they also came away with an appreciation of lawyers as people.

That is the first program I took to the schools. My sixth-grade middle school teachers could not pick which class for me to visit so we agreed I would visit them all. That led to my spending one day a month at the middle school teaching the entire sixth grade.

Roughly 600 students a year for almost two decades. And that program continued until the Frustration Triangle kicked in with a double whammy. The two teachers who were the catalyst of that program retired and they closed that middle school and spread the remaining teachers all over the school district.

Yes, frustrating, but it does not take away from the thousands I did get to teach.

10. Lastly, there is an anecdote from the life of Sir Winston Churchill, about a very short commencement speech that he allegedly gave to the Harrow School, on October 29, 1941.

As the story goes he arrived at the auditorium with his usual top hat and cigar, walking with his cane. He stepped up to the podium. With great pomp, he set down the cane, took off his top hat, and set it on the lectern. He gazed out at the waiting audience, who was hanging on his every word.

He took the cigar out of his mouth, leaned towards the microphone and with great authority, boomed “Never give up.”

The audience waited breathlessly for his next words. He paused a few seconds and then leaned towards the microphone again and said, “Never, never, never give up.”

Sir Winston Churchill then put the cigar back in his mouth, his hat back on his head, took his cane, and walked off the stage.

That was his entire commencement speech.

I like to tell that story because it demonstrates the attitude you need to persevere in life.

Unfortunately, it never happened. So now when I tell it, I have to add that fact. I then share with them a portion of that not so short commencement speech. Churchill said:

“Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never – in nothing, great or small, large or petty – never give in, except to convictions or honor and good sense.”

When I was asked to share some thoughts with the choir today I seriously considered doing just as Churchill was alleged to have done, by standing up at this podium and saying simply this, “When it comes to your fights for Civics and LRE remaining a subject in school, remaining a benefactor of governmental and private money, remaining an opportunity for our youth, remaining the foundation of our country’s future – never, never, never give up.”

With that I thank you again for the award, I am deeply honored by it, and hope to remain worthy of it until my last breath. Thank you for listening.