

2012-2013 Supplement to “A Life in the Law” by the Houston Bar Association Speakers Bureau

About the Houston Legal Community and the Houston Bar Association

Houston is the fourth largest city in the United States, and thousands of lawyers live and work here. The Houston Bar Association’s 11,250+ member attorneys have a commitment to serving the legal profession and the community. Established in 1870, the Association’s purpose was to maintain high standards in the legal profession and provide legal education for Harris County attorneys. Today, the HBA still adheres to those basic principles, but has expanded its goals to include public service and better access to legal services for all citizens in the Greater Houston area.

Law is a Service Profession Governed by Ethical Guidelines and Rules of Conduct

A lawyer is a representative of clients, an officer of the legal system, and a public citizen who has a special responsibility for the quality of justice. A consequent obligation of lawyers is to maintain the highest standard of ethical conduct. These standards are characterized by the principles of honesty, candor, and fairness.

A lawyer performs various functions in his or her relationship with clients. As advisor, a lawyer provides a client with an informed understanding of the client’s legal rights and obligations and explains their practical implications. As advocate, a lawyer zealously asserts the client’s position, within the rules and principles of the adversarial system. As negotiator, a lawyer seeks a result advantageous to his or her client but consistent with the requirement of honest dealing with others.

All lawyers are subject to the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct. These rules govern the lawyer-client relationship, a lawyer’s obligations to judges and non-clients, and other issues such as the restrictions on advertising and the supervision of less experienced lawyers. Lawyers who disobey these rules or violate their obligations to their clients are subject to a grievance process that may result in discipline including public reprimand or the revocation of the lawyer’s license to practice law. Additionally, lawyers may be sued by a former client for negligence, improper handling of client funds or property, or other misconduct.

Current Trends in the Demand for and Income of Young Lawyers

The legal profession is like all careers in that it is subject to the supply and demands of the economy. Recently, there has been a downturn in the number of available jobs for some graduating law students. For the law students who graduated in May 2011, only 55% of graduates were employed in full-time, long-term, law-related jobs within nine months after graduation.

Additionally, salaries for lawyers vary widely. The State Bar of Texas reported in 2009 that median incomes for lawyers with less than six years of practice varied from \$53,000 to \$117,000, with some making less and some making more depending upon the type of employer and practice. The report also found that the median income for new lawyers in the greater Houston area was \$87,000. Practicing law is a noble and rewarding profession, but it is worthwhile to keep in mind that in many types of practice, the rewards are non-monetary.