

PROFESSOR JOHN H. McCORD: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN LAW SCHOOL AND LAW PRACTICE IN ILLINOIS

*Charles C. Bingaman**

I had the opportunity to work with Jack McCord in the late 1960s when he was a young law professor in Champaign, and I was an even younger lawyer creating and managing continuing legal education (CLE) courses and publications.

It was perfectly natural for me to invite Jack to teach in IICLE tax courses, and the outcome was always successful. He had a masterful ability then—as he still does—to organize an enormous body of complex material and to help practitioners understand it. Jack served well into the 1970s as a planning committee member and regular teacher on IICLE's annual December federal tax course, explaining the fundamentals and new developments in income tax, estate and gift tax, and several specialty tax areas that needed his teaching touch. On more than one occasion, he filled in on short notice for practitioners who were scheduled to teach but were prevented from appearing because of illness or foul weather. It was understood that if Jack was around, every tax subject would be covered—and covered well—even if the intended instructor failed to appear.

That Jack never failed to elicit enthusiastic practitioner reviews was particularly remarkable in light of the traditional view among many practitioners that law professors are not, shall we say, immersed in the real world of the nitty-gritty of law practice.

Looking back now on the more than three decades in which I have worked with Jack in the teaching of practitioners, I can see that his multifaceted efforts have constituted an extraordinary two-way bridge between legal academia and legal practice, a bridge that has spanned the gulf lamented in every study of the profession in the past fifty years.

Key elements of that vital bridge Jack has created between the two branches of the profession in Illinois include the following:

* *Executive Director, Illinois Institute for Continuing Legal Education.*

- In the early 1970s, Jack prepared the initial outline and edited the manuscripts for *Closely Held Corporations*, a multi-volume, best-selling practice handbook published by IICLE that lawyers throughout our state have relied on as the standard work in the field ever since. In addition, he has participated in the updating of *CHC* through several new editions and supplements, including the writing of supplements to four chapters as recently as the summer of 1999. Along the way Jack coordinated the planning and writing efforts of a score of practitioners so that the work blends the law and the practice in a seamless and valuable way for those seeking practice guidance.
- Later in the 70s and 80s, Jack was an architect—along with several practitioners—of *Buying and Selling Businesses*, an IICLE publication that enables lawyers and their clients to manage these vital transactions with skill and confidence.
- In the 1990s, Jack was the University of Illinois College of Law's liaison with IICLE in a series of jointly sponsored annual courses entitled *Advising Illinois Businesses*. In that role, he planned the programs, taught tax and business planning sessions, and recruited other law school faculty to teach practitioners.
- Through contacts Jack made in his CLE efforts, he was able to recruit practitioners for part-time teaching stints at the law school—visits that brought the practice into the academy and further built and maintained the bridge that is an important part of his legacy of teaching.
- In an even more unusual step for a leader of the academic bar, Jack has always encouraged—and facilitated—attendance by his students at CLE programs. Even if it meant rescheduling classes, collecting checks (or financing course materials out of his own pocket), and handling other “arrangements,” Jack put his students in touch with the practice at an early time in their legal educations. He made sure that they met the practice leaders in the fields of study and understood the importance of career-long learning.
- Finally, Jack has served since 1991 as a member of the board of directors of the Illinois Institute for Continuing Legal Education, our state's primary source for career-long learning for practitioners. IICLE has never had a more concerned, enthusiastic, and interested director. Jack's participation has spanned the entire reach of his academic interests from content of programs to techniques for teaching practitioners, ways and means for IICLE to introduce emerging technologies, and the delivery of CLE and the practice of law. In this work as well, Jack has

used his affinity for practitioners to nurture effective board relations and to move forward IICLE's agenda and success.

Few of Jack's law school colleagues or students are aware of the full dimensions of the bridge Jack has built between the academy and the practicing bar over the last three decades. But describing *what* Jack has accomplished in this aspect of his career would hardly be complete without mentioning *how* he has always gone about it. In his case, it's been a consistent, attractive, and engaging mix of enthusiasm for his subjects—mostly sections of the Internal Revenue Code—and enthusiasm for the CLE project at hand. Even during times of great personal challenge, pressing concerns for family members, or College of Law matters, Jack is always Jack—always glad to hear from you, always communicative, always interested in your concerns, and always available as long as you need him for advice, assistance, or simply as a sounding board.

I happen to think that the integration—or at least the close working together—of the legal academy and the practicing bar has been too long neglected, to the detriment of each. Law professors could serve their students and their institutions more effectively if they were in touch with practitioners on a regular basis through CLE or bar association activity. Practitioners need academic infusions and exposures throughout their careers, whether mandated or not. That most practitioners and law faculty operate in wholly separate realms is an unfortunate and costly loss to our profession. Jack McCord, in his own very consistent and enthusiastic ways, has built at least one bridge that has nurtured productive personal relationships and solid achievements connecting those realms over several decades.

The best tribute any of us—CLE administrators, practitioners, or law professors—could make to Jack upon his retirement is to maintain the bridge he has created and to broaden it wherever possible for the good of the whole profession and the public.

