

PROFESSOR RICHARD GERSHON: AN EXAMPLE FOR US ALL

*Sam Martin**

I first met Professor Richard Gershon as a fledgling first-year law student. He was wearing an Atlanta Falcons jersey and a large grin. The Falcons had just beat their bitter rival, the New Orleans Saints, in a close game the Sunday before. As a Saints fan myself, I couldn't help but feel a bit jealous of his happiness. But, as I came to learn was his usual way, Professor Gershon showed grace and humor as we discussed the game and the season. I did not know heads from tails that first year, but I knew I had found a mentor and friend. Professor Gershon was welcoming to all, and he had a way of making new students feel that they were a part of the Ole Miss Law family within minutes. It's one of the many qualities that made him a great dean and professor.

After I took Wills and Estates from Professor Gershon during my first year of law school, I made it my mission to take as many of his classes as I could the rest of my time in law school. I took Family Law, Legal Ethics, and various tax law classes from him—all subjects that I now use in my practice every day. At the time, I had absolutely no interest in tax law and could not have cared less about learning the implications of the estate tax, but I wanted to learn from Professor Gershon because I enjoyed his teaching style and his humor. He filled PowerPoints with relevant memes, told us stories like getting rejected from *Jeopardy!*, and overall, simply made learning those nuanced areas of the law much easier and enjoyable. While those classes were vital to my career, his commitment to humility and kindness are the lasting impressions that impacted all who knew him.

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Professor Gershon significantly shaped many of our perceptions regarding what constitutes a successful career and fulfilling life. As law students and young attorneys, it is all too easy to become consumed by the relentless pursuit of achievement—whether attempting to climb in your class rank, earn a spot on Law Review, excel in Moot Court competitions, secure prestigious summer clerkships, or strive toward partner tracks. In an industry driven by competition, it is common to lose sight of the basics. Despite experiencing incredible success throughout his career as a lawyer, author, professor, and dean, he remained remarkably humble and self-deprecating. His ability to laugh at himself and maintain perspective served as a powerful reminder that genuine professionalism is rooted in humility and authenticity. And, more than anything, his brand was kindness.

He agreed to coach our Moot Court team for a competition one semester. He spent many afternoons and nights helping us draft our briefs and practice arguments, always quick to point out the flaws in our logic with a good metaphor and case cite. He joked that he wouldn't have agreed to coach our team had he known that we would be trekking to Albany, New York, in February for the competition. Despite the freezing and hostile weather, our team advanced to the championship round. During the final round, one of the judges made the comment that they were surprised we were so articulate, given our southern drawl. Professor Gershon, with his quick wit, spoke up, "Well as you can tell, we can write, we can argue, and we are even wearing shoes too!" His loyalty to his teams always shined through.

His legacy extends beyond the classroom and courtroom; it is etched into the hearts of all who had the privilege to know him. His commitment to his family, career, schools and teams, and students, was unwavering. Professor Gershon's dedication to his students' growth, his genuine kindness, and his ability to inspire those around him serve as a guide for future generations of lawyers. As we carry forward his lessons, both professional and personal, we are

reminded that success is measured not solely by accomplishments but by the kindness we show and the lives we touch.

As we mourn his passing, we also celebrate the profound influence he has had on each of us—inspiring us to be better lawyers, mentors, and friends. The law school and our profession will miss him dearly. And, from this Saints fan, I say “Fly Falcons Fly.”