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LEADERS IN THE LAW

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Lawrence C. Mann

Bowman and Brooke LLP, Troy

Education: Wayne State University Law School, 1980

Specialty: Product liability defense



Leadership, says Lawrence C. Mann, “is having mastery of the subject matter and the courage to apply that mastery to make a decision.”

Mann’s high-stakes product liability defense practice requires him to be the master of many subjects.

Getting up to speed requires “working to the limits of your energy,” Mann said. “You are always challenging yourself to master something so you can teach it to a judge and a jury.

Not all of Mann’s teaching has taken place in courtrooms. In addition to his legal practice, Mann was an associate professor of law at Wayne State University from 1984 through 2008. He received tenure in 1991.

From an early age, Mann knew that education was important.

“I appreciated and understood the civil rights climate in the country, as did most African-American families, when I was growing up. It was very clear that you weren’t going to be able to do anything in this society, as fractured as it was, unless you excelled in education.”

Mann earned a B.A. from the University of Michigan. He graduated, cum laude, from Wayne State University School of Law in 1980, where he was elected to the Order of the Coif. He assumed he would be civil rights lawyer or a plaintiff’s advocate.

“There’s some irony in me being a defense counsel,” Mann said. “One of

the things I heard coming out of law school — unfortunately, given the times, it’s sad — but as recent as 1980 there were questions in the plaintiffs’ bar about the effectiveness of an African-American counsel in a plaintiff’s case in Wayne County.”

He got one offer for plaintiff-side work. But he was not interested in workers’ compensation and turned it down.

There were several offers from the defense side. Mann took one, “and from there, it evolved.”

Injustice and unfairness upset him, he said.

Both sides of the bar “have to play the game in an above-board, by-the-book fashion.”

“The rules are there for a reason and the process is as it is, and we as counsel have to be committed to that process, first and foremost,” he said.

“We have lost some appreciation of that as we move along with high-power, high-stakes litigation, with a lot of investment dollars involved. There is pressure to not invest in the process in the interest of advancing your position in a particular case.”

Not following the rules “does tremendous harm to the system itself.”

Mann is gratified when cases are won on facts and the law, rather than emotion.

He recalled two cases where he represented Honda. Both plaintiffs

suffered catastrophic brain injuries. One case involved a car, the other an ATV. Both resulted in defense jury verdicts.

“The cases were very sad,” he said. Both he and the juries had “empathy and sympathy for those individual plaintiffs.”

But, “the scientific evidence, the engineering evidence, put before the juries compelled them to put aside that sympathy — something that is very hard to do — and vote in favor of a Japanese defendant,” he said.

“It was a fair result, the right result, based on the laws of physics and the laws that govern the design of various kinds of motor vehicles.”

Mann looks for the fair result, the right result, outside the courtroom as well. He’s been a driving force in his firm’s diversity efforts, locally and nationally. He’s written on the topic for *In-House Defense Quarterly*.

He’s also written about product liability developments for the Institute for Continuing Legal Education and the *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law*.

He speaks on a variety of topics for organizations nationwide and overseas.

In 2010, Wayne State University honored him as a “Treasure of Detroit,” recognizing him as an individual who has made a lasting contribution to the law.

— Ed WESOLOSKI, Esq.