
Tom Barnard

Indianapolis Bar Association Presidential Inauguration Speech

I want to thank Justice Slaughter and Judge Lynch for introducing me and swearing me in. I can't tell you how much that means to me. In my 36 years as an attorney, my chance to practice law with these two lawyers stands out as a highlight. From Judge Lynch, I learned calm, balanced analysis of the most challenging issues, always with an eye toward the proper outcome, and always above the fray. From Justice Slaughter, I saw perhaps the greatest example I have ever seen of the phrase a "gentleman and a scholar." Both of these Judges elevate a room when they enter, and that is something we should all aspire to.

I also want to thank so many of my current and former colleagues for being here today. In nearly four decades of practice, I have been blessed with many outstanding mentors and friends, and this has been so important to me and my family. For example, back in 2004, Linda Pence organized a fundraiser for an orphanage in Kenya that my wife and I were traveling to – and Judge Barker wrote a letter in support of our prospective adoption. That letter was important.

I also want to thank my law firm, Taft, and our managing partner Bob Hicks, who have been so supportive. Also, my partner Jeff Abrams, is a former Indy Bar President and set a fine example for me in my role this year. And of course, James Bell was fantastic this past year and Indy Bar is strong and healthy.

I am truly honored to be standing here today as your 141st president. I have been an Indy Bar member since 1982, and I have seen firsthand how important our Bar has been to so many lawyers and non-lawyers. I'm excited and energized for 2019, and I hope you are too.

Personal Background

Let me tell you a bit about me – I know so many of you here today, but others might be asking – "who is this guy and why is leading our Bar Association?"

Truth be told, I wasn't born to be lawyer – I was born to be a preacher. My dad was a minister, my grandfather was a minister – head of worldwide Christian education. My two aunts married ministers, my uncle was a minister and my great grandfather (born in 1878) worked most of his life for the church in Irvington.

So you might ask, where did I go wrong?

I think that I went right, and I'll tell you why.

There are important parallels between being a minister and a lawyer. They both counsel. They both need to be good listeners. They both need to deeply care about people. And most important, they both make it their life's work to improve the lives of those around them.

That's what we do, right?

At the end of the day, our highest calling is help our clients – to solve their problems. Lawyers are uniquely trained and qualified to solve problems, right? It's what we do every day.

I have reflected a bit on how I jumped off the path of our family's long line of ministers, and here are a few of the stepping stones:

FIRST - I got my first real job when I was 10 yrs old with the *Indianapolis News*, which I delivered in the afternoon after school.

But I really wanted a job with the [*Indianapolis*] *Star* because it paid more, but you had to be 12!

So at age 12 I became a *Star* paper boy and it left a lasting impression on me.

I learned how to get up every day at 3:30, how to have all my papers delivered by 5:00, how to be reliable – you cannot miss a day – everyone wants their morning paper.

The one thing I wanted the most was a pair of gold paperbags. We were given white paperbags, but if you could go an entire year without a single complaint, you were named an “Honor Carrier” and were awarded gold paperbags. I am proud to say that I wore my gold paperbags for many years.

But I would say the most lasting impact was the feeling I had when outside at 4:00 in the morning before sunrise, when the whole world was asleep, and I was out there getting my job done, creating a powerful sense of accomplishment. As if life was a race and I was getting a head start – I have to admit, I liked this feeling of enterprise and competition.

SECOND - The second stepping stone, and my first law lesson came in 5th grade. I had started my own business, named “Tom’s Enterprises.” I brought Hostess cupcakes, candy, snacks and flavored toothpicks to school in a briefcase and sold them at lunch. But I branched out into the loan business. I had a few collection problems, however, and I came to realize that it was generally a good idea to have agreed upon the loan terms BEFORE you make the loan, as opposed to when you are trying to collect. I was too young to know it then, but I really needed a good lawyer! Heck, I didn’t even know what the Indiana Uniform Consumer Credit Code was, or where to find it!

THIRD - The third event occurred in 1972, when I first heard a song by the band Chicago, a song entitled “Dialogue.” I loved the line, “will you try to change things with the power that you have, the power of a million new ideas?” As a 16-year-old, I was captivated by the concept that I could have an idea that no one else had ever had, and that it might change the world. The song ends with the lines, “we can change the world now, we can save the children, we can make it happen!” I believed it then, and I believe it now.

So I became inspired to try to change things, and I decided to try to make an impact by running for president of my high school’s student council. My campaign slogan was “We Can Make It Happen,” after the Chicago song. I actually ran on a campaign promise – that I would have a jukebox installed in our cafeteria – now that was a big deal back in 1973! Well I won the election, we got the jukebox, and I was on my way – to where I wasn’t yet sure.

Law school still beckoned, and I remembered all my problems with Tom’s Enterprises back in 5th grade – I really needed to know the rules. Jerry Seinfeld has said that “to me a lawyer is basically the person who knows the rules. We’ll all throwing the dice, playing the game, moving our pieces around the board, but if there’s a problem, the lawyer is the only person that has actually read the rules inside the top of the box. I wanted to be that person.

So I think that these events taught me that with the right ideas, the right commitment, the right application of those ideas, you can Make it Happen. I see hints of this every day in my law practice, and that is one of the reasons I love being a lawyer.

My Family

Now I want to tell you about the people who have supported me along the way – my family. My Mom and her husband, Jennie Beth and Bob, are here, along with my two brothers and their wives, Steve and Darlene, Dave and Nora.

My mom is 90 years old and taught me that you never stop learning – and she taught me that if you believe in something – then DO SOMETHING about it! At age 86, Mom became an environmental activist, a vegan, and is helping to save our planet through her church and all her friends. Do not ask for a plastic straw in her presence! Mom was an elementary school teacher for over 30 years, teaching primarily 5th grade, and left a lasting positive impact on hundreds of kids. Thank you Mom for all you've done for me and for being here today.

My immediate family is here. I want to first thank my wife, Rene – who I would say is the heart and soul of our family. She's my best friend, my constant advisor, and has the biggest heart of anyone I've ever met. We've been married 30 years and I am hoping for another 30. Thank you so much for your daily support. My daughter Anna, son Dougie and his wife Olivia, daughter Carly, son Izak and daughter Eva. These five kids are the best thing that have ever happened to my wife and me. Being raised by two attorneys, these kids have definitely acquired lawyer-like skills — you can tell by the way they negotiate with me. For example, when I attempt to negotiate my 14-year-old's bedtime, you would be hard pressed to know which one of us has a law degree! My wife Rene always says to our kids, "you're perfect!" I agree, and I am so proud of all of you.

I also have my extended family, most of whom are lawyers. In our big family, when something is important to one person, it is important to us all. And today is that day for me. So thank you family, for all your support.

Indy Bar

Now let's focus on the main reason we are all here – the Indy Bar.

Mark Twain said that the two most important days of your life are the day you were born, and the day you found out why. I believe that one of the reasons we were born is to improve the lives of others, and one of the best ways we can do that as attorneys is through the Indy Bar.

I mentioned earlier that lawyers are uniquely trained to solve problems. We need this skill now more than ever in our society. We also serve as role models on **how** to solve problems, which is equally important. So many today do not understand how to deal with the issues they face.

A recent article addressed the issue of the skyrocketing rates of teen suicides. What these kids did not understand is that their problems were "figureoutable." What they most needed to know is that as bad as it might seem, everything is figureoutable. Once they understood this, their clouds lifted and they could see a future.

This ties into one of the most important things Indy Bar does – we help those who don't have lawyers understand that their problems are figureoutable, and by doing that, we improve their lives. But this requires a connection that we are losing.

I believe that over the past several years, with the rapid increase in social media, we have lost the **human connection** that is so important to us. We work remotely, or alone in our offices,

and interact in limited ways that don't allow us to really get to know each other. And I believe that this human connection is a vital part of exchanging ideas and inspiring each other.

It comes down to this: being a lawyer is about two things – knowing the rules, and putting a human face on it. Indy Bar allows us to do this. Through the Bar's 250 programs we are improving lives around us. We provide legal services through free wills, our lawyers go to hospices, we answer phones, we go to libraries and schools. Our legal training is providing an essential key to doors that are blocking the lives of so many. One of the primary roles of our Indy Bar is to serve as the **vehicle** you can drive when you want to help someone – we make it easy for you. We also provide that needed **human connection**.

Let me give you another example. As a volunteer at women's shelters, I met a young woman named Michelle. She was in fear for her life and had three children with her in the shelter. She leased a car in her own name, but her boyfriend had the car, a restraining order was in place and she couldn't get near him or the car. Without her car she couldn't get to work, and you get the idea, her life was spiraling out of control. We were able to tell her what she could do, what she could not do, and she came to realize that her problems were figuroutable. IndyBar members are doing this type of work every week, every month, every year.

And let me make a point here — you don't have to commit to 30 hours, or chair a committee. Just an hour or two can have a meaningful impact on another person's life, like Michelle's.

When my wife and I were in Kenya we heard the phrase, "you can't change the entire world, but you can change the entire world for at least one child." I think the same holds true in our profession. Legal problems can often seem like the entire world to persons who just cannot see past them. When we solve a client's legal problem, whether in your office or as a volunteer in a library, we can actually change that person's world.

And you give Indy Bar the right new idea and we can make it happen. Here's just the most recent example. On Thursday, January 17 of this month, a member emailed Julie with an idea – there are all these furloughed federal workers who aren't getting paid due to the government shutdown. They must have legal questions (landlord/tenant, creditors, childcare). Indy Bar should do something! By the next day, Julie Armstrong had engaged two Bar Section chairs, emails went out, and on Tuesday January 22 – a group of over 25 attorney volunteers were available for 4 hours to meet with these federal workers about their legal issues. This is really extraordinary. We are nimble – we are facile – we are ready and able to help when the need arises. And it makes me so proud to be a part of Indy Bar.

Now we have very big year ahead. Our lease is up and we'll find a new place to call home. We are going to focus on increased engagement, through new Task Forces on law students, and In-House and Large Firms. We will have continued emphasis on small and solo practices with our Practice Builder and Business Builder programs. We also will have several new marketing initiatives, and we will continue to emphasize our largest event, the Bench Bar Conference held this year in French Lick.

And we are blessed with one of, if not THE most accomplished, high achieving Bar staff in the United States. You may not know that there is a national organization – the National Association of Bar Executives. Our own Julie Armstrong, will be installed this year as the president of the national organization. This is a highest honor in her profession, signifying her accomplishments and reputation as one of our country's top Bar Executives. With Julie, Kari, Mary Kay and all of

our outstanding staff, the Indy Bar is poised to accomplish great things this year. Would you please join me in giving Julie and her staff a well deserved round of applause?

Let me close with this: As your president, I want to be more than an Honor Carrier with gold paperbags. I don't want to merely avoid complaints – I want to lead and inspire you, to take us to even higher levels of achievements.

40 years ago I adopted the opinion that we each have a power that no one else has — the power of our own ideas. It looks like the rock band Chicago has taken me full circle, and I now find myself in a place where we can harness these ideas through IndyBar to make important contributions to the lives of so many.

My term as president won't be defined by the things I do – it will be defined by how many of our attorneys realize that they have their own ideas. It will be defined by how many people realize that their problems are figuroutable, and that they can count on lawyers to address those needs.

It will be defined by a million new ideas.

As the song said, and with our more than 4,000 members, perhaps we really **CAN Change the World Now. So now let's get started!**

Thank you so much.