

WHAT DOES TLA STAND FOR?

Richard A. Westley*

This question deserves a thoughtful answer.

TLA is nationally known and respected for the skills and competence of its attorney members, who day in and day out demonstrate the highest standards of professional excellence to their clients, to the courts, to their adversaries, and to the public. Through its exceptional educational programs, legal publications and member-to-member exchanges, TLA lawyers are well informed, well prepared, and well received. When they are unable to handle a matter themselves, they have direct access to over 1,000 attorneys all across North America and around the world.

TLA stands for professional excellence. But that is only the beginning. Most lawyer organizations can make the same claim.

TLA is also known nationally for the way its members give of themselves for the greater good of their colleagues, the industries they represent, and the legal system as a whole. They devote countless hours to noncompensatory activities such as writing articles, giving presentations, organizing meetings, sharing advice and expertise with fellow members, mentoring new lawyers, and teaching law students. They ask nothing in return except reciprocal considerations when the need arises.

TLA stands for unselfish sharing. But so do many other lawyer organizations and most lawyers.

TLA members accept only the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct. They espouse diligence and do not cut corners or take the easy way out. They put their clients' interests ahead of their own. They avoid conduct that brings disrepute to themselves, their firms, their profession and their organization. Their enviable record of success in the courtroom is not purchased with false pretenses, intimidating tactics or scorched earth strategies.

TLA stands for the highest standards of personal conduct and ethical behavior.

TLA members are always there to assist each other in times of need. Modesty prohibits them from trumpeting their unselfish deeds, but they do not go unappreciated. TLA members put their families first, but always seem to find time to help their communities and their fellow lawyers.

TLA stands for good citizenship. What sets TLA apart is the unique camaraderie among its members. They are more than just friends. They are brothers and sisters who share the most fundamental core values that lie at the very heart of any system of laws and orderly commerce. What lawyers do is important – vitally important. Without a sound legal system, no society can ever hope to achieve mankind's highest aspirations. But least as important as what lawyers do is **how** they do it. They must temper adversarial aggressiveness with unwavering respect for their opponents. They must tirelessly advocate for justice for their clients without ever losing sight of the greater good. They must celebrate victories with restraint, and accept defeats as merely a stepping stone to ultimate success. They must above all, respect and never undermine the system of laws, which makes all other human achievements possible.

TLA members rarely speak of such things. They simply take them for granted. But when strangers walk among them, they quickly grasp the true character of the people who make up this organization. Not all strangers admire these traits. Some believe that the pursuit of monetary success and fleeting notoriety are what being a lawyer is all about. But those who embrace the TLA values make it a priority to become active participants. The best of them will become TLA's future leaders.

TLA stands for a lot of things, but in the end what it stands for more than anything else is elevating the practice of law to the most productive and rewarding occupation anyone can ever hope to enjoy.

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Editor's Note: The foregoing statement of what TLA stands for was written by TLA member Richard A. Westley upon his return home to Madison, Wisconsin from the TLA Annual Conference at Fort Lauderdale, Florida where there was a discussion of some of the attributes of TLA during the TLA Executive Committee meeting held on Wednesday, May 7, 2008. Dick's motivation to write the statement was his sincere appreciation for TLA, which is undoubtedly shared by the other members of TLA. The Executive Committee and Officers of TLA did not know of Dick's writing the statement until it was forwarded by Dick to TLA immediate Past President Don Vogel, who then forwarded it to the TLA Executive Committee and Officers. It was then urged by many that the statement be published in this issue of *The Transportation Lawyer*. As TLA Past President and newest TLA Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient Bob Alderson noted, the statement "captures the essence of our Association."