



Patrick Ducharme, Ducharme Fox LLP

dedication

Balancing Tension between Law and Family is the Key to Lawyer's Fulfilling and Successful Career

by Dawn Trottier, photo by Trevor Booth

After thirty years, Patrick Ducharme still gets excited about his work, and he has no plans of stopping now, or ever. Having just turned 60 years old, he is a senior partner and head of the criminal law department at Ducharme Fox LLP, 800 University Ave W.

"They'll have to carry me out in a pine box. I'll still be making an argument on my way out," he says.

The idea of retirement, according to Ducharme, is for someone who wants to move on to something better than what they are doing.

"I don't see anything better. It's not work if you love it, and I love every aspect of it," he states.

Throughout his career as a criminal lawyer,

Ducharme has always been very involved with the community. He educates others in his profession, stands on many professional and community committees, has written and continues to write journals and articles, and contributes to many local causes. He recently contributed to the expansion of the Windsor Humane Society and was also the emcee for the roast to raise money for the building.

Ducharme knows what it takes to be a great lawyer as opposed to a good lawyer. He's taken that knowledge and not only applied it to his outstanding career, but also to teach future lawyers at the University of Windsor and to mentor young lawyers.

"I owe a great debt of gratitude to my students. They keep me young and thinking fresh," he says.

He educates lawyers and future lawyers on the "jury personality" – one who has developed a mastery over language, is a consummate storyteller, without props or a paper; and is capable of evoking feelings of compassion or pity from his audience. He writes, "They know, usually instinctively, that their every word, act or gesture is being closely observed by the jury. They are magnetic. For them, the trial is elemental human drama and they're invariably 'centre stage.'"

"When speaking to a jury, you can't have an ounce of pomposity. You can't be arrogant or condescending," says Ducharme.

In 2007, he received the GLAD Award presented by the University of Windsor Faculty Association in recognition to the outstanding contribution to students at the Faculty of Law.

He doesn't take the students' evaluations of professors lightly. His enormous amount of dedication to the students is anchored with their appreciation of gaining valuable knowledge from his lectures. It's important to Ducharme that there is a connection and bonding between him and the students. He enjoys teaching them, but if they don't enjoy being taught, then he would reconsider his position.

"If I ever started scoring low on [student evaluations], and fell to some-

where where I wasn't right at the top, I'd quit. The students are important to me, but even more important is their reflection on me."

Incredibly, he has managed to stay at the top of his game and is now teaching his 54th full course.

Ducharme is adamant that the immense amount of dedication he has to his students, his clients, and his work is the key to a fulfilling career. He was selected by his peers to be on Woodward and White's list of "The Best Lawyers in Canada."

Most recently, Ducharme reached a milestone in his career and became a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers. It is an honour bestowed upon the few exceptional trial lawyers who possess high ethical standards, professionalism, civility and collegiality in North America; no more than 1% of the total number of lawyers in a state or province are called to Fellowship.

Having represented high-profile hockey players, porn actresses, and murderers, Ducharme surprisingly gives the same amount of attention and effort in lower profile cases as the 'celebrity' cases.

"It doesn't matter whether the cameras are rolling or not, you have to treat every case like it's the utmost importance to you."

As for separating a good lawyer from a great lawyer, Ducharme knows that having empathy for the accused, no matter what the outcome is, that

they will feel that they have been represented in a respected and professional manner.

"You have to walk a mile with the client. Put yourself in their shoes and realize that this is a pivotal moment in their lives," he says.

While he knows it's unrealistic to win every case, he still puts his heart and soul into it and if it's not enough, at least he can lay his head at night and know that he did everything he could for his client.

And while working sixteen-hour days and traveling in and out of Windsor for cases might seem like it would take a toll on his personal life, Ducharme is blessed to have a loving and supportive family. His wife of thirty-seven years, Janice Ducharme, and his two boys that reside in Panama City help keep the criminal lawyer grounded and balanced.

"I could have never done it without my family," he says.

His family enjoys spending time together in Miami Beach, and he and Janice love traveling to Europe, with Italy being their favourite country.

While he may never call himself great, it is inarguable that Patrick Ducharme has made significant contributions to his clients, his students, and his community.

His advice on being a successful lawyer is as follows, "You have to stand up, look like you care, speak with conviction, and most importantly, you have to know yourself."

