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**The Unsung Heroes of Our Profession**

**by Robert J. Francavilla**

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When we hear about an outstanding result by one of our colleagues, the ensuing buzz invariably centers around the great job done by the lawyer on behalf of his or her client and about how deserving of full and fair compensation the plaintiff in that case truly is. While it is certainly appropriate and important to recognize the fine work of the lawyer who handled the case, as well as the positive attributes of the client that made a great result possible in the first place, we should never forget the unsung heroes of our profession who toil equally long hours in comparative obscurity helping to deliver the results.

I'm talking about the non-lawyer members of our law firms, from receptionists to paralegals. For example, a receptionist is quite often the first line of communication between a prospective client and the firm. This article is to recognize the very valuable contributions these unsung heroes make to our profession and our clients. The people in my firm are being thanked personally and as representatives of those in the other plaintiff law firms who serve similarly. We are very proud of our receptionists at Casey, Gerry who handle their jobs with professionalism as well as a great deal of human compassion for what our clients have been through and are continuing to go through. Putting an individual at ease at the start of his or her experience in the legal process is one of the most important aspects of running a successful office. So, to our receptionists, Sandra Rapp and Aundra Del Mundo, I want to personally thank you for all that you mean to our firm.

We also have two absolutely outstanding appointment secretaries in our office. Steve Leonard and Lia Haggerty calmly, competently and precisely organize the schedules of the numerous lawyers in our office and point us in the direction we need to go on a given day. The manner in which they handle their job is not only appreciated by our clients, who regularly praise them, but by staffs at opposing law offices, who often tell me what professional and easy to work with people we have on our staff. Steve and Lia, you are truly appreciated by not only me, but everyone in our firm. Thanks.

In the case of most successful law firms, there is usually an individual who handles the business and personnel aspects of the firm so that the lawyers and other staff members can be freed up to pay full time and attention to the clients and their cases. In our firm, this person is

our office manager, Liz Mackres. Liz is responsible for just about every aspect of the smooth operation of our law firm and does a fantastic job. Without her, I don't know where we would be. Our firm is also supported by Loreta Willkomm, our accountant, who flawlessly handles all of the financial aspects of operating our firm. Deanna Hastings, an administrative assistant to so many of us, is responsible for a wide variety of tasks too numerous to mention here. Without Liz, Loreta and Deanna, our firm would not be nearly as organized and efficient as it is. Thanks to all of you.

Our case manager, Linda Blair, is responsible for tracking statutes of limitations, communicating with clients and generally keeping all of our new cases moving through the evaluation process; and she does it with all the professionalism and competence needed in such an important position. Thank you, Linda.

We also have two investigators on staff -- Juan Ordaz, lead investigator, and Paul Francavilla. These two gentlemen very often have the greatest amount of contact with new clients at the outset and always work professionally and empathetically with them. In addition, their investigation very often is directly responsible for the success of a given case. Their hard work is most valuable and appreciated.

Finally, our staff of paralegals -- without whom I cannot imagine being able to keep a case load moving -- are second to none. My paralegal, Mary Jo Cunningham, has been employed for longer than I have worked at the firm. She not only has the ability to evaluate potential cases as well or better than many seasoned lawyers, but she can also spot issues, recognize what's important and move a case toward a successful resolution with the best of them. Perhaps her most important quality, however, is the love and compassion she shows each and every client.

Mary Jo navigates clients through the difficult ups and downs of their lawsuits and the emotional strain of everything they have gone through. In almost every case, the clients constantly praise and thank Mary Jo for making what they thought was going to be an impossible journey, not only bearable, but something that will serve as a life-long reminder that good can actually emerge from a tragedy. Mary Jo's qualities certainly apply equally to our entire team of paralegals who tirelessly pour their heart and soul into our clients' causes. Thank you, Mary Jo and all of our paralegals, Andy, Janet, Kathy, June and Beverly.

There are others who deserve recognition as well. Sandra Ware, our word processor, moves more work through her department than I have ever seen anyone do and she does it with the biggest smile and most positive attitude imaginable. Our file clerks, Danielle and Claudia, are also much appreciated for their huge contribution in helping our office to run in an organized and efficient manner. Thank you.

Thanks also goes out to the rest of the Casey, Gerry team for all that they mean to us, including Kim, Ellen, Shari and Howard.

I refer to the people in my law firm in order to show my appreciation for the unsung

heroes of my law practice and yet I'm certain that every office in this town is loaded with talented, compassionate people without whom there would not be a successful law practice, much less a law practice at all. So, to all the members of all the plaintiff law firms and practices, as a fellow representative of people, thank you for the huge part you play in fighting for justice for all of them. You are all truly the unsung heroes of our profession.