
Prominent Lawyers Publish Essay Defining and Shaping Ethical Responsibilities of Lawyers

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Harvard Law School's Center on the Legal Profession and Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP are pleased to announce the publication of an essay calling for lawyers, as professionals and as citizens, to balance concerns about the current economic transformation of lawyering with a strong commitment to four ethical responsibilities: to clients/stakeholders, the legal system, their own institution and society. The essay is co-authored by three internationally renowned lawyers representing corporate, law firm and academic environments. In their essay, authors Ben W. Heineman, Jr., William F. Lee and David B. Wilkins state: "There is widespread agreement that the legal profession is in a period of stress and transition; its economic models are under duress; the concepts of its professional uniqueness are narrow and outdated; and, as a result, its ethical imperatives are weakened and their sources ill-defined." The authors argue that lawyers, acting in their fundamental roles as experts, counselors and leaders, must revive these imperatives in major corporate law departments, major law firms and leading law schools drawing not just on the core competencies of traditional lawyering but on a set of complementary competencies required for broad counseling and leadership.

The essay, entitled "*Lawyers as Professionals and as Citizens: Key Roles and Responsibilities in the 21st Century*," is a joint statement based primarily upon decades of experience the authors have collectively had in government, public interest lawyering, law firms, corporate law departments and academia. It sets out a "practical vision" about how to define and implement an ethical transformation at the same time corporations, law firms and law schools are facing an economic transformation. They analyze the nature and limits of formal professionalism, forces changing the legal profession, and the importance of the ethical dimensions which underlie institutional durability and professional satisfaction and which have attracted young people to the law for more than two centuries.

"In this critical time of change, it is imperative that we explore how lawyers can meet the broad and diverse ethical challenges they will face throughout their careers," said Harvard Law School Dean Martha Minow. "This essay offers important, specific proposals to achieve this goal in corporations, law firms and law schools. I hope that it will encourage lawyers, academics, and policymakers from all areas of the profession to identify and debate the ethical and professional responsibilities of

lawyers in the 21st century."

The essay provides six main parts and brings to the surface questions about lawyers in their fundamental roles as expert technicians, wise counselors and effective leaders. It will ultimately spark a dialogue and prompt a call to action on addressing the challenges confronting the legal profession. To [read the essay](#) and connect with others on this important discussion, [visit Harvard Law School's Center on the Legal Profession website](#).

About the Authors

Ben W. Heineman, Jr. was General Electric's (GE) senior vice president-general counsel from 1987-2003, and then senior vice president for law and public affairs from 2004 until his retirement at the end of 2005. He is currently a distinguished senior fellow at Harvard Law School's Center on the Legal Profession, senior fellow at Harvard Law School's Program on Corporate Governance, senior fellow at the Belfer Center for Sciences and International Affairs at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, and lecturer in law at Yale Law School.

William F. Lee is a partner at Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP (WilmerHale) and is one of the country's foremost intellectual property and commercial trial and appellate lawyers. He became the fifth managing partner of Hale and Dorr in 2000, and, in 2004, became the co-managing partner of WilmerHale. He has served as the John A. Reilly Visiting Professor and the Eli Goldston Lecturer at Harvard Law School. He is senior fellow of the Harvard Corporation and has served on the Harvard Board of Overseers.

David B. Wilkins is the Lester Kissel Professor of Law, vice dean for Global Initiatives on the Legal Profession, and faculty director of the Center on the Legal Profession at Harvard Law School. He is also co-founder of Harvard Law School's Executive Education Program, where he teaches and helps to direct professional development courses such as Leadership in Corporate Counsel, Leadership in Law Firms, and the Accelerated Leadership Program. Professor Wilkins is also a senior research fellow of the American Bar Foundation and a senior faculty associate and member of the Faculty Committee of the Harvard University Edmond J. Safra Foundation Center for Ethics.