

PRESS RELEASE

The Great Communicator: When Leo Bearman Jr. Speaks, Juries Listen

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Leo Bearman Jr. had been practicing law with his dad for only a few months when Leo Bearman Sr., a larger-than-life icon in the Memphis legal community, handed him the case file for his first jury trial.

"Thanks, Daddy, but do me a favor," Bearman said. "If you're there I'll be worrying about how I should have asked a question or if you disapprove. So please don't come to court."

"That's fine. I'm tied up that day anyway," the elder Bearman replied. "Just get the case ready."

In the courtroom, young Bearman was surprised when, just moments after the morning break, the judge announced, "We'll take another recess now. Send the jury out."

When the jurors were gone, the judge spoke: "Mr. Bearman." Bearman rose from his seat, then realized the judge was addressing someone in the back of the room. There stood his father.

"Mr. Bearman, what are you doing here?" the judge asked.

"Well, I promised my son I wouldn't come down but this is his first jury case and I'm nervous," Bearman Sr. explained. "I'm just going to sit in the back and watch. I'll be real quiet."

"Mr. Bearman, your son's doing fine," the judge said. "You can't stay here."

Bearman Sr. laughed. "Apparently you didn't hear me," the judge said, more firmly. "I'm ordering you from this courtroom."

"And for about 20 years [my father] never sat in on a case of mine, which was the best thing that ever happened to me," recalls Bearman, a shareholder in Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz in Memphis. "It allowed me to develop my own style and my own reputation. It allowed me to handle the problems of a trial without being able to turn to somebody and say, 'What do I do next?'"

That individual style—courteous, respectful, kind and never condescending—has made Bearman, 74, one of the most admired trial lawyers in Memphis. During the past five decades, the man named 2009 "Litigator of the Year" by the litigation section of the Tennessee Bar Association, has won many products liability cases on behalf of vehicle manufacturers, pharmaceutical companies and makers of medical products. Bearman is currently the only attorney in the state elected to both the American College of Trial Lawyers and the American Academy of Appellate Lawyers.

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