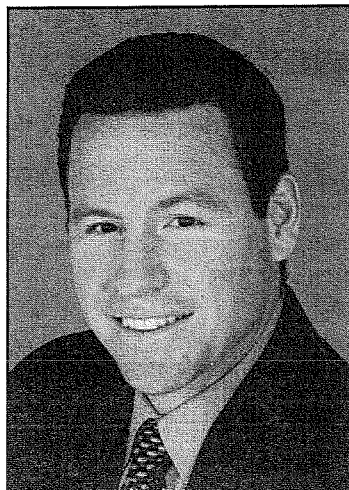


Self-Made Man

By Spencer H. Silverglate



A funny thing happened to me on the way to court one day.

I was hustling along Flagler Street in downtown Miami like only a new lawyer can. I barely noticed the other self-absorbed people shuffling past me or the merchants mechanically performing their early morning routines. But then it stopped me, almost as if someone had screamed out my name. There in a jewelry store window stood a statue of a god-like figure carving himself out of a block of stone. The caption read, "Self-Made Man."

Wow, I thought, that could be me. After all, I put myself through college and law school after my parents died in my teen years. I made it by the sweat of my own brow. No one handed me a thing. I did it my way.

No doubt about it—I was the self-made man.

Unfortunately, I lived that delusion for many years. It wasn't until I was changing my only child's diaper one night that I had a revelation of sorts. It started with a simple question: I wonder if he will ever appreciate the sacrifices we are making for him?

As silly as it sounds to me now, it was only at that moment that it dawned on me...I didn't change my own diapers when I was a baby. Nor did I get up in the middle of the night to make my bottles or rock myself back to sleep afterwards. I didn't teach myself to walk, talk or ride a bike either. My parents graciously endured all of this and more—much more.

I then began to think of the tremendous contributions I received from others in my life. Everything from teaching me reading and writing in grade school to torts and contracts in law school. At that moment, it occurred to me that just about everything I know came from someone else...from parents, family, friends, coaches and countless teachers and mentors. I was anything but a self-made man.

The lessons of that night came flooding back to me recently when I attended the funeral of a dear friend, Henry Latimer. Henry, or "Lat" as his friends called him, was a giant in the South Florida legal community. Lat was a brilliant jurist and attorney, but that's not how he was remembered. Lat mentored dozens of lawyers, young and old alike, right up until his untimely death. A career devoted to

helping others—to mentoring—is what distinguished Lat. That is his legacy and the lesson we take from his life.

People take pride in saying that they came up the hard way; that they pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps. We like to think of ourselves as the master of our fate and the captain of our souls. But I don't believe it anymore. To me, the self-made man (or woman) is a myth. Anyone who has achieved anything in life has many people to thank.

If we reflect on it, I'm sure we all can identify the mentors in our own lives. Whatever I know about practicing law came from my mentor, Bud Clarke. And just as surely, I know I have an obligation to pass on my knowledge to others. Mentoring is one of the great traditions of our profession.

I urge everyone reading this column to mentor someone. Wherever you are in your legal career, you have something to give that someone else needs. If you're not sure where to start, I recommend the Florida Bar's E-Mentor program. Experienced attorneys are paired with law students, and mentoring is done via e-mail. This is a low commitment way to impact our profession, not to mention the life of another human being and future colleague. You can register online at www.flabar.org/ementor.

Whatever path you choose, reach out and mentor someone. After all, none of us is self-made.