

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin

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## Lawyer shares story of finding first client

**W**hat lawyer doesn't remember their very first client? Who cannot recall the jubilation one feels when, for the first time ever, someone retains you to be their lawyer? I remember my first client like it was this morning. His name was Dr. Maurice Johnson and the year was 1990. He was a dentist, entrepreneur and adventurer. He was also a dear friend who recently died.

When I first saw Maurice, he was standing before a judge's bench, pro se, explaining why a lawsuit against him was meritless and should be dismissed. I was in the courtroom at that time waiting for an unrelated case to be called. I had been licensed for about two months and couldn't tell you the difference between a notice of filing and a notice of motion. I was so nervous about being in court for only the second time in my life that I did my best to remember my own name and who I representing so that when my case was called I wouldn't make a fool of myself — notwithstanding the fact that I was only there to get a continuance. Having committed my name and client to memory, I started listening to Maurice and a plaintiff's lawyer make their arguments to the court. Eventually, the judge ruled and Maurice and the opposing counsel disappeared into an adjoining room to write up an order. The order was to provide

Maurice 30 days to retain counsel and appear back in court.

My case was called next and I actually got it right — I accurately identified who I was, who I represented and why I was before the court. "Granted," the judge said. "Please prepare an order and give it to the clerk," she directed. I looked around the courtroom and saw about 30 different forms, none of which said "order." So, I entered the same room Maurice walked into. There, on top of a table, was a stack of blank orders. Eureka! I must have drafted and redrafted the order three or four times, not really knowing what to say. I began listening to the discussion between Maurice and his opposing counsel. Even I, at the ripe old age of a two-month practicing attorney, knew that something was amiss. The lawyer was trying to get Maurice to say in their order that he had no defense to the case and

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### GONE FISHIN'



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stipulate to a judgment. But the judge in their case had merely directed them to come back to court in 30 days in order to allow Maurice enough time to retain an attorney.

The lawyer briefly left the room to step up on another case and I looked up at Maurice who immediately asked me what I thought he should do. Without hesitation I responded, "While I don't represent you, I suggest that you politely ask the clerk to call your case again and then

share counsel's comments with the judge." And that is exactly what Maurice did. The tongue lashing the court doled out on the rogue counsel was brutal. I left the courtroom with a smile on my face. Maurice caught up to me in the hall and asked me for my card. It was the first time anyone had asked me for my business card. The next day Maurice called and we set up an appointment. He had several dental practices, a Popeye's Chicken franchise and various real estate investment properties that needed the care and attention of a crackerjack lawyer.

Five years later, I left the firm I was with to start my own practice out of my house. On my first day as a solo practitioner the phone rang at 8 a.m. sharp. It was my first call. "Josh ... it's Maurice ... time to go to work. I want to take on a dental partner and need a contract drafted." That call meant the world to me and gave me the confidence that I would be able to make it on my own. It's been 17 years since that day and I have never forgotten Maurice's call or the day and circumstances in 1990 which led me to my first client.

What this true story taught me is that one never knows when, where, how or why an attorney-client relationship will be formed. To this day, I view almost every person I come in contact with as a potential client. It is an approach that has served me well. It is also the reason I made a dear friend and my first client.