

Putting their Training to Use

By Reg P. Wydeven
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Every day I'm getting more reminders of how old I'm getting. Take music. I don't know any of the artists that my kids like and I don't particularly enjoy some of their favorite songs.

A perfect example is the Willow Smith song 'I Whip My Hair Back and Forth' where she sings about solving her adolescent problems, such as "haters," by thrusting her locks to and fro. To me, the song sounds like fingernails on a chalkboard. I told my kids that I can't understand what she's singing and it sounds just like noise to me. And then, like a lightning bolt, the image of my father laughing maniacally entered my head, as he said the same thing to me thirty years ago.

Thankfully, I'm not alone in my thinking. Many critics panned the song, claiming it would have never been recorded if not for Willow's superstar father, Will Smith. Likewise, many movie critics claim Jaden Smith would never have starred in the remake of 'The Karate Kid' without his famous dad.

So while I may not love the Smith children's performances, I certainly can't scoff at them for using nepotism to jumpstart their careers. After all, I got a job at the law firm where my dad was a partner.

I've said many times how blessed I was to practice with my dad. I was also very lucky to be hired at the firm after law school without really having a formal interview. However, I arguably was subjected to a 20 year informal interview with each visit to my dad at work. Because of my good fortune and lineage, I didn't have to endure the stress of working with the career placement office at law school and suffer through countless interviews, like many of my classmates.

While this process was frustrating and difficult for my friends, things are much worse today. In the past I've written about recent law school graduates being hired only to be paid a modest salary to stay away from the office until economic conditions improve. Many grads aren't even that lucky.

That's what prompted a group of nine New York Law School graduates to sue their alma mater for misleading them with post-graduate job statistics. The suit is one of fifteen similar lawsuits filed across the country by grads who all allege their law schools lured them to enroll with high expectations of job placement but left them unemployed and deep in debt.

The NYLS grads' suit claimed the school's marketing materials advertised that between 90% and 92% of the school's graduates secured full-time jobs as lawyers. However, the figures actually included students in part-time jobs, as well as jobs that didn't require a law degree. As a result, the grads believed they overpaid for their degrees and sought \$225 million in damages.

New York Supreme Court Justice Melvin Schweitzer disagreed with the graduates, however. While the former fellow law school grad sympathized, Schweitzer held that college graduates "are a sophisticated subset of education consumers, capable of sifting through data and weighing alternatives before making a decision regarding their post-college options."

His decision went on to say that the graduates used their "disappointment and angst," fueling them to turn their newfound litigious skills against the school that taught them those skills. Schweitzer refused to rule against NYLS for failing to anticipate the "most severe contraction in demand for legal services this court can recall since the early 1970s."

Addressing the plaintiffs' allegation that the school's promotional materials were based on a small and "deliberately selected" sample of graduates, Schweitzer pointed out that the materials did disclose that the statistics weren't representative of the whole class and cautioned that the highest salary reported was not "typical" for most law graduates. In other words, the young lawyers committed the cardinal sin of failing to read the fine print.

The graduates plan to appeal the decision. In the meantime, they can always whip their hair back and forth.

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