

Disciplinary Boards Do Not “Like” Lawyers’ Social Media Posts Criticizing Judges

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In today’s digital age, people all too often take to social media to share their opinion on a wide array of matters. Unfortunately, in the last few years, more and more lawyers are learning the hard way that their social media posts criticizing judges can have a lasting impact on their legal careers.

For instance, the Illinois Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission recently suspended a Chicago-attorney for three years after she made several blog posts about a pending adult guardianship matter. In particular, her blog posts made numerous impugning statements suggesting the judges, guardians ad litem, and many attorneys within the local probate system were fostering a corrupt environment. In reaching its decision to suspend her for three years, the Commission found the attorney violated the rules of professional conduct by recklessly making false statements concerning a judge’s integrity or qualifications, as well as engaging in conduct that is prejudicial to the administration of justice. *In re JoAnne Marie Denison*

Similarly, the Louisiana Attorney Disciplinary Board sanctioned an attorney after she used the internet and social media in an attempt to influence two judges’ future rulings in her client’s complex child custody and visitation case. Specifically, the attorney asked online followers to sign two online petitions she drafted requesting one judge to renounce jurisdiction in the matter and asking the other judge to withdraw a prior court order. In addition, the petitions listed the judges’ contact information and encouraged her supporters to contact the judges. The attorney then took to Twitter to further criticize the judges’ handling of the case. Finding the attorney violated several rules of professional conduct by disseminating misleading and inflammatory information about members of the judiciary in an attempt to influence their rulings on a pending case, the Board disbarred her. *In re Joyce Nanine McCool*

Lesson Learned: Though the disciplinary actions described above were a result of rather egregious misconduct, they help serve as a reminder to all lawyers that the rules of professional conduct also apply to their actions on the internet and social media.

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