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## Getting it Right

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## GETTING IT RIGHT

*Eileen Kaufman*\*

Leon Lazer's career deserves to be celebrated for countless reasons. But, to me, the single most exceptional feature of Leon the lawyer, judge and professor is his unwavering commitment to getting it right. I witnessed this firsthand as reporter to the Pattern Jury Instructions Committee, which Leon has chaired for over thirty years.

I first met Leon in 1988 when I interviewed to be a reporter for the PJI Committee. (The PJI Committee produces a multi-volume set of books each year that provides the black letter jury instructions in civil trials and also serves as a highly regarded treatise on New York law.) Like many before me, I was totally intimidated in Leon's presence – after all, I was well aware of his reputation as the towering intellect of the Second Department. Of course, he did very little to put me at ease – instead grilling me on my experience, my work ethic, and my scholarly prowess.

Happily, he did hire me, and for eighteen years we worked together on the PJI Committee. The committee meets one weekend a month in an airless room on the top of the criminal court building in

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\* Professor of Law, formerly Vice Dean, Touro College, Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center; B.A. with highest honors, Skidmore College; J.D. and LL.M., New York University School of Law. Professor Kaufman served as the Co-President of the Society of American Law Teachers, the Reporter for the New York Pattern Jury Instructions Committee, the chairperson of the Bar Admission and Lawyer Performance Committee of the American Association of Law Schools, and currently co-chairs the Committee on Legal Education and Admission to the Bar of the New York State Bar Association. She was the 2004 recipient of the Ruth G. Schapiro Award of the New York State Bar Association. Professor Kaufman has published primarily in the areas of civil rights, women's rights and human rights. Among her recent publications are: "Shelter from the Storm: An Analysis of U.S. Refugee Law as Applied to Tibetans formerly Residing in India," 23 *GEO. IMMIGR. L.J.* 497 (2009); "Women and Law: A Comparative Analysis of the United States and Indian Supreme Courts' Equality Jurisprudence," 34 *GA. J. INT'L & COMP. L.* 557 (2006), reprinted as lead article in *INDIAN JURID. REV.* 2007; and "Dazzling the World: A Study of India's Constitutional Amendment Mandating Reservations for Women on Rural Panchayats," 19 *BERKELEY WOMEN'S L.J.* 32 (2004), co-authored with Louise Harmon.

lower Manhattan for eight or nine straight hours a day. By the end of the day some committee members are nodding off or checking stock prices on line, but not Leon. Leon will still be attentive to every detail, insisting that each word inserted into PJI is accurate, and questioning whether we have chosen the best way to convey the meaning we seek. Leon insists on both technical accuracy and comprehensibility, two goals that are often hard to reconcile. Days after the meeting, Leon will send emails to the Committee or the reporter indicating that he has been mulling over an issue and suggesting better language than what the committee had decided after hours and hours of deliberation. Writing by committee is always challenging but writing by a committee chaired by Leon Lazer means the process will take ten times as long and the final product will be twenty times better.

We have been so lucky at Touro Law Center to have Leon on our faculty sharing a lifetime of knowledge and practice with our students and bringing the same dedication and commitment to his teaching that he brings to every intellectual endeavor. What better role model for our students than a professor who insists on getting it right and who believes passionately in the nobility of the profession.

Leon is a true hero to me – because of his passion for the law in pursuit of justice, because of his enormous intellect, and although he often tries to mask it, because of his heart which is as boundless as his mind. Congratulations Leon.