

PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND DISCIPLINE

By

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GOOD HOUSEKEEPING IS MORE THAN A MAGAZINE

The seal of approval awarded by *Good Housekeeping* magazine to products advertised in its issues and elsewhere is a recognition eagerly sought by the manufacturers. The phrase “good housekeeping” should be as equally desired by lawyers in its application to their office procedures. It should relate to a standard of professional efficiency which lawyers must maintain or suffer sanctions by disciplinary bodies from the level of the local ethics committee to that of our Supreme Court.

A substantial area of complaints from clients of unprofessional conduct stems from the failure of attorneys to establish and maintain proper office records and procedures to insure that the rights of the client are not substantially prejudiced. I cite specific examples from my files: Failure to commence action with all appropriate dispatch and well within an applicable statute of limitations; failure to interpose answers, as a consequence of which default judgments are entered, with bank accounts, salaries, etc., subject to garnishment, failure to have prepared and filed, with accompanying payment, federal and state corporate and individual income tax returns and federal estate and Minnesota inheritance tax returns within time limitations, with resulting penalties and interest; and failure to utilize all pre-trial discovery procedures available, as a consequence of which the attorney has not properly prepared himself for trial.

I would hope that the subject of law office management will be a part of the curriculum in the program of compulsory legal education now under consideration by the Supreme Court. In the meantime, I assure those who read this article and who wish assistance in putting their office house in good order, and keeping it there, will have complete cooperation from this office.