

PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND DISCIPLINE

By

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DISTRICT ETHICS COMMITTEES

One of the most important functions prescribed by the Rules of Discipline is that performed by the twenty District Bar Association Ethics Committees, consisting of approximately 150 lawyers located throughout the State.

With few exceptions, the Rules require that complaints alleging unprofessional conduct by attorneys shall, in the first instance, be referred for investigation to the district ethics committee of the district in which the attorney has his principal office. To the extent that the district committees fail to function, the entire system bogs down.

When we first assumed office, we found that a number of the district committees were not functioning at all, and others were not functioning efficiently. We found that the committees were uncertain about procedures; they had no full-time central source to contact for advice or assistance. Too frequently, because of the awkward and underfinanced procedures, complaints did not receive the attention they should have received.

Now that communication has been established between the district committees and this office, these committees are performing their duties as contemplated by the Rules.

Their job is not a pleasant one. They are falsely accused of white-washing lawyers' conduct, are subjected to abusive language from crackpots and ill-tempered complainants, and frequently they are faced with people who either cannot understand or do not wish to understand. On occasion they are required to issue a private reprimand or admonition to a fellow lawyer. In other instances, they find it necessary to forward the complaint to this office, with the recommendation that formal disciplinary action be taken. They serve without any compensation except the knowledge that their activities benefit the public, the profession, and the courts. They are performing their duties efficiently, courageously, and with good judgment. The profession owes them a great debt of gratitude. It is an honor to be associated with this fine group of lawyers.