

Florida Supreme Court adding 'civility' to the bar admission oath

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The Florida Supreme Court, concerned about increasing incivility among lawyers, altered The Florida Bar's lawyer's oath in a unanimous ruling Monday, "recognizing the importance of respectful and civil conduct in the practice of law."

The unsigned change notes efforts by the American Board of Trial Advocates to underscore the importance of civility in the practice of law. The new clause added to the Florida lawyer's oath is borrowed from the South Carolina oath and states "to opposing parties and their counsel, I pledge fairness, integrity and civility, not only in court, but also in all written and oral communications."

Miami trial lawyer Brian Tannebaum, former president of the Florida Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, said he has witnessed a growing lack of civility by lawyers in recent years "as the grab for dollars has become more important."

"The use of the word immediately has gotten as common as the word good morning," he said. "Lawyers are using technology to be uncivil with each other by communicating at the last minute by email and expecting an answer immediately. There is no concept that lawyers are human beings that have families and children and other things in their lives going on."

Tannebaum welcomed the new pledge but said, "It's embarrassing that lawyers need to be told how to behave."

The pledge takes effect immediately, and no appeals of the change will be permitted, the opinion states.