

Washington Law Review

Volume 60 | Number 3

6-1-1985

Lehan K. Tunks—A Personal Recollection

William R. Andersen

University of Washington School of Law

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.uw.edu/wlr>

Recommended Citation

William R. Andersen, Dedication, *Lehan K. Tunks—A Personal Recollection*, 60 Wash. L. Rev. 565 (1985).
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.law.uw.edu/wlr/vol60/iss3/6>

This Dedication is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Reviews and Journals at UW Law Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Washington Law Review by an authorized editor of UW Law Digital Commons. For more information, please contact lawref@uw.edu.

LEHAN K. TUNKS—A PERSONAL RECOLLECTION

William R. Andersen*

What follows are some observations about Lee Tunks, formed during my several years of assisting him with deaning duties at the Law School, and during the years since when we have been faculty colleagues and friends.

I always think of Lee as a law school dean. Perhaps that is because he was a dean when I first met him. Perhaps it is because what I really know about deans and deaning I learned first from him. Whatever the cause, he seems to me to be one of those people destined to be a law school dean. I have known many fine deans since those days, but most feel the job is one they didn't plan on having and one they will someday (hopefully soon) be well rid of. By contrast, Lee Tunks seemed to the manor born.

He was an efficient, well-organized administrator. He was careful, thorough in matters of detail, and never let exceptions pass unnoticed. He was fond of quoting that "genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains."¹ Lee had that rare ability to keep his agenda clear of minutiae, and as an administrator perfected a skill he described approvingly in others as the ability to make paper disappear—surely an important survival skill for any administrator, in or out of academia.

More than assuring survival, however, Lee's ability to keep administration in its place made possible development of the more important role of the dean—that of providing educational leadership. Lee was unsurpassed in this role. It is a difficult role to describe. As I watched Lee in the role, it seemed to me to have at least three identifiable components.

First and foremost is the matter of perspective. Like all other institutions, educational institutions are living, changing organisms. If change is not to be wholly haphazard—the accidental result of random eddies in the current—someone connected with the institution needs to devote considerable time and energy to scanning the far horizon, gathering information on developing needs of the profession, translating these into long-range goals for the institution, defining and redefining the goals, connecting them into coherent patterns, and developing strategies for their achievement. I have never known an educator who could do this with more energy, insight and style than Lee Tunks.

Secondly, Lee seemed to think it was a responsibility of an educational leader to help provide an intellectually stimulating environment for all

* Professor of Law, University of Washington.

1. J. HOPKINS, *WORK AMONGST WORKING MEN* (1870).

members of the law school community. This attitude extended to faculty members, to students, for whom new professional growth opportunities were always being explored, and to the staff, whom Lee wanted to find both joy and reward in their daily activities in support of the institution.

Take one example. One of the most perplexing internal issues in an educational institution is that of allocating teaching resources—of deciding, in the vernacular, “who teaches what.” This task is not done well by committee and inevitably becomes the dean’s responsibility. As a tyro, I had supposed the dean’s role in this process was largely a matter of treaty-making, with the objective being to “cover” the curriculum in a way that created the least dissatisfaction.

But for Lee, this was not a task at all. It was an opportunity. It was a search for ways of blending present and future needs of the students with developing faculty interests in teaching and research. This necessarily required a longer view than a treaty-maker uses. Thus, it was at this point in my own teaching career that I received a welcome memo from the dean asking not what I preferred teaching next year, but how I saw my own teaching and research interests developing over the next five years.

From such a perspective, allocating teaching resources takes on an entirely different character. For the school as a whole, it permitted planning in a much more effective way. Where clear goals could be identified for the institution, the gradual redirection of resources could be begun. For individuals on the faculty, it was stimulating as well. One could get out of oneself for a short time, could reflect on one’s own developing interests in research and teaching, could get some sense of the institution’s developing needs and what role one might play in that growth. I think Lee saw it as an important part of his role to encourage us to plan our own careers in light of the largest framework of possibilities and opportunities.

Thirdly, Lee saw that educational leadership required effective resource management. The school had to acquire and deploy sufficient resources to be able to move toward the goals it had set. Here, Lee was insistent, tireless and successful. He was responsible for vast infusions of new resources from the university, for creating new opportunities for alumni and other friends of the school to assist in the school’s work, and for building scholarship funds, including significant new scholarship money for the minority students who began coming to the law school during those years. In part because of these successes, it was during these years that the school began to be mentioned as a school with national standing.

Planning for a new building also began during Lee’s tenure as dean. The historian who digs out those original plans will find them very much in the Tunks style. The building would have been much larger than the building

finally built, would have contained residence and dining facilities, expanded space for a growing library, classrooms sufficient for future as well as present needs, faculty research facilities ahead of their time and on and on. Again, Lee always had his eye on the future and on the broader canvas. I once heard someone ask Lee if he wanted the school to have a state, a regional or a national reputation. Always one step beyond the rest of us, Lee replied that the school should have an international reputation and, indeed, today it has.

As a dean, colleague or friend, Lee is in many ways unique. Perhaps for that reason, he is not easy to capture in one of the conventional classifications of people. And perhaps for that reason, he remains a puzzle to some. As one who worked closely with Lee for some five years, I have concluded that communicating successfully with Lee was largely a trick of getting your receiver tuned to the right wavelength. That done, Lee's transmissions were always insightful, frequently humorous and often profound—though you might have to bang on your receiver now and then if the reception got a little muddy.

Lee's friendship is one of the treasures of my experience at the University of Washington. He is as warm and generous as only the Irish can be. He is honest and direct in his dealings. And he pays his colleagues the ultimate academic compliment: he listens very closely. His reactions to my own half-formed research ideas are unfailingly useful. My analysis is always improved by such an exchange and the connections between my ideas and the broader picture are clearer.

Finally, all these traits make it clear to me that Lee believes in the promise of human rationality, and celebrates the value of disciplined intellectual effort. To those who view educational management as more of a logistical exercise than an intellectual adventure, more a matter of satisfying political demands than of exploring intellectual possibilities, the human capacity for rational action may not seem a particularly relevant concept. But to Lee, I think it was central. He was never in doubt about the importance of the emotional or political dimensions of a matter. But neither was he daunted by them. Somewhere deep in his person is a respect for order and a belief that the human mind—if pressed rigorously and long enough—can quietly achieve some of it. I think of Piet Hein:

Somebody said
that Reason was dead.
Reason said, no,
I think not so.²

2. Hein, *Dead Reasonable*, in *GROOKS II* (1973).