

HOW IT REALLY WORKS OUT THERE



Eric Parker JD'86

Eric Parker JD'86: From Dean's Cabinet to Lawyering Life Lessons

/ BY PAUL PEGHER



PHOTOS BY MARK WILSON

It's the first Saturday morning of Spring 2018 final exams, and 18 students have stepped away from their studies to gather in the dining hall for a different kind of learning experience—one that might provide as much preparation for their future careers as any test they'll take.

Their host is Eric Parker JD'86, adjunct faculty member at Suffolk Law, the managing and co-founding partner of Parker Sheer LLP, and a highly regarded tort trial lawyer. He is leading the year's fourth and final installment of what he calls Practice Ready Networking Sessions.

It's just one of the many ways Parker gives back to Suffolk Law, complementing his role as a member of the Dean's Cabinet (see related story page 30).

Among the many topics he covers on this day, Parker places particular emphasis on evaluating compensation, reminding students to consider the differences between a paycheck and work experience. "A person working 80 hours a week for \$160,000 is

essentially working two jobs but may not try a case in their first 10 years," he says. "They're helper bees. Meanwhile, a boutique firm attorney may try several. Even if it's for less money, that experience will really pay off down the road."

Parker brings in a panel of young Suffolk Law alumni, including two members from his firm, to answer a few questions:

- How does actual practice differ from your expectations as a student?
- How do you balance personal and professional life?
- What skills give you an advantage over your peers?

Parker designs these sessions to help students and young alumni rehearse a critical professional task: networking. Conversations about practicing law can lead to new work, he says. "But that won't happen if you don't step up and engage."

The networking sessions also serve as a counterpart to a class that Parker introduced at Suffolk four years ago, Practice Ready Tort Litigation. There, students learn important skills such as how to draft discovery forms and demand letters, navigate office dynamics, find professional insight in Lawyers Weekly, and even how to launch a firm.

Parker's contribution to his students reflects a blend of personal interest in their success and professional wisdom from his 30-year career in personal injury trial work, which has earned him a place among the Massachusetts Super Lawyers "Top 100 Trial Lawyers" list.

Parker understands the professional challenges facing young lawyers, which is one reason he's a big fan of the school's Accelerator to Practice Program. Accelerator students work in a law practice embedded in the school, handling all of the nuts-and-bolts issues that come up along the way; they tend to stand out because of the additional process management and legal technology skills they bring to the table.

"The brilliance of the Accelerator is that it helps students get real-world experience," Parker says. "My class and networking sessions share the same goal: to turn interns and junior associates into 'keepers.'"