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When a young lawyer applies for a law license, she must give over a huge amount of information on her "character and fitness" to practice law. In some states, this Kafkaesque process involves requiring the applicant to submit a signed affidavit from each of her prior employers. It is for this reason that I know with certainty that I held over 20 different jobs prior to becoming a public defender. I was an axe thrower at the renaissance fair, a cashier on the graveyard shift at the Jack in the Box drive through, and a mental health technician at a psychiatric hospital. One summer in high school, I spent several weeks standing on various suburban and industrial street corners brandishing a six foot long arrow-shaped sign directing passing cars toward "model homes."

During my first few months as a public defender, I encountered a problem I had never faced before. I could not figure out how to do my job well. I had navigated jobs with perverse incentives in the past, some with success. I had also shipped my share of burgers out the window missing pickles or lettuce because it was more important to "move a car" in under two minutes than to give the car's driver what she paid for. The incentives in the courthouse were more perverse, the costs to human beings were unimaginably higher, but none of this was new to me. It was just another machine grinding up human lives.

My problem was that I could identify my job duties, but not figure out how to execute them in a way that vindicated all the lofty ideals my law professors and lawyer-mentors had invoked. For example on any Thursday, the judge may have 60 people whose probation he wants to revoke in the two hours before lunch. I have never met any of them before. If I talk quickly and get lucky, most of these people will go to jail, but for less time than if I were not here at all. As my hand cramps from filling out "waiver of rights" forms, as people stand up five at a time and admit guilt to various wrongs usually without ever talking to me, I wonder whether I am a "guardian of due process."

It seems insincere to frame it that way, but consider the alternative. During my first year I followed around the senior public defenders in the office to see how they practiced, and I read a number of trial and hearing transcripts. One of the lawyers I shadowed had a policy of never going to the jail. He explained that he was very likely to catch one of those terrible resistant infections that had been going around lately and besides, he was experienced enough to meet with the client in about five minutes before the judge took the bench. I read a trial transcript where a judge asked another of my colleagues whether he had an objection to the prosecutor's sentencing recommendation. He said "I'm just a speed bump in this courtroom." That lawyer sincerely believed that his voice did not matter and that there was no point in pretending otherwise.

Within this culture it was tempting to believe that two minutes of heartfelt begging on behalf of each probation client was effective public defense. Still the whole thing didn't sit right with me, and I remained with the question like an itch. What does it look like to do this work well? Are we doing as well as we can under the circumstances? Perhaps in Louisiana the public defender was wise to be content as a hump in the road, slowing down the bus as it sped people to prison. A humble job, but surely better than nothing. I knew one thing about this perspective: I would sooner quit. I had been fired

from my high school job as a road sign. I would not now, twelve years later, lay down in court and become an even lower traffic fixture.

After a year as a public defender, I attended two weeks of training in Birmingham, Alabama. It was the first installment in a program offered by Gideon's Promise, which asked us to make a commitment to return every six months for the next three years. Seven years later I still go back. Unlike other lawyer training programs such as the National Criminal Defense College or the Gerry Spence Trial Lawyer's College, Gideon's Promise is an organization only for public defenders. Also unlike the others, training is not the most important thing that Gideon's Promise does. The organization's founder Jonathan Rapping has been working for the last fifteen years to answer my question about public defense. How can public defenders—especially those working in the most hostile environments in the country—do their jobs well?

In his new book, *Gideon's Promise, A Public Defender Movement to Transform Criminal Justice*, Rapping details how, in the same year that I decided to abandon the drive through window and go to college, he moved his family to Atlanta to establish a statewide public defender system in Georgia. Rapping begins with portraits of several Georgia public defenders who resemble those who would later be my colleagues in Louisiana. These lawyers personified the culture in the courts, which was one of rapidly processing cases, efficiently transporting bodies into cages, and running roughshod over any speed bumps along the way. This culture, he writes, was a greater challenge than any policy, training deficit, or funding impediment.

After his experience with the Georgia statewide system, the book follows Rapping through his efforts to build a stronger public defender office in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and the formation of the Gideon's Promise organization. It is a personal history which illuminates some of the most important yet under-covered events in the justice reform movement of the last two decades, supported by dozens of stories from the front lines of places like New Orleans, Nashville, and Jackson.

Those stories of public defenders struggling to protect their clients in a climate of injustice and inhumanity eloquently illustrate the need for the core work of Gideon's Promise, transforming the culture of public defense to support strong, client-centered defenders. Rapping argues that public defenders who compassionately tell the stories of their clients can catalyze broader change in the criminal legal system, but that they must be sustained by a robust culture of defense in order to succeed.

I can attest that he is correct on both counts. Seven years ago, I was the first person in my office to attend a Gideon's Promise session. More than ten lawyers have gone after me, including the whole management team. Without the support that the community has provided, I would not have lasted very much longer than that first year as a public defender. Now things are different in that office. There are dozens of dedicated career defenders, and though there are no speed bumps, judges and prosecutors drive carefully for fear of more robust obstacles. The culture has changed.

I welcome this new book because it allows the story of public defense reform to be heard in broader circles, and because it has allowed me to deepen my understanding of the history and context of the new public defense movement of which I am grateful to be a part. It is also an important addition to the justice reform conversation because it places public defenders at the center of the movement, where we belong.