

Welcome to Episode 123 of the Extra Mile podcast for Bar Exam Takers. This is Jackson Mumey, and I'm so glad that you're spending time with us. We're honored, as always that you would take some time out of your day to join me on this podcast. We've got a wonderful interview coming up later in today's podcast with a successful Florida Bar taker, Chigozie Nwanko. He's a great guy, and it's a terrific story of his accomplishment of passing the bar, not on his first try but really working through some significant challenges to be successful on the Florida Bar exam. I hope you'll stick around for that.

What I wanted to do before we get to that interview, however, is something that is a bit unusual for me. In fact, I think it's probably in some ways unprecedented. Those of you that know anything about me may have inferred that I have fairly strong political views, although I've tried very hard over the 20 plus years that I've been teaching the bar review to keep my snide and sarcastic comments to a minimum in the lectures and in the podcasts.

But the truth is that I live in the same world that all of you live in, and it's important to me and it's important to us as a business, to recognize and understand where we are in the bigger scheme of things. For those of you that don't know much about my personal history, let me just share with you that in the last 10 years or so, my wife Sarah and I have spent a significant amount of our time living in some of the poorer neighborhoods in the United States, most recently in Richmond, Virginia, in a place called Church Hill which is actually one of the poorest African American communities in the country. Prior to that, we were in the city of New Orleans post-Katrina, literally in the city itself helping with the rebuild. In our experience and our time, we've come to recognize the wonderful privileges that we have as well-educated, relatively affluent white Americans.

My point is that over the last month or so, since the last presidential election, I think it's really become very clear that the rule of law is in danger. The things that I have presumed I would never see in my lifetime, we are now confronted with. The specter of racism, the clear implication of the white nationalist movement and its influence, the possibility of an attorney general who was so racist that he couldn't be confirmed for a federal judgeship 20 years ago.

Now I recognize that in just the statements I've just made, some of you have instantly decided that I am a bleeding-heart liberal, a Hillary supporter, and you're never going to do with us, and I am sorry for that. I'm sorry if that becomes offensive to you, but I don't think I can stand by any longer and not say anything.

You see, one of the driving goals behind Celebration Bar Review has always been to bring people to the bar who might not have otherwise made it into the bar. We've made a real point of reaching out into the minority communities, to women, to foreign-trained attorneys, to people who are marginalized because of race or sexual orientation, and really tried to be clear that we want them to become a member of their bar. We believe that the bar is better, the community is better, when it represents and is represented by people who look like the community. The reality for us is that when the bar becomes nothing other than privileged white men over a certain age, we've lost something.

And I say that as a privileged white man over a certain age. But I also recognize that it is vitally important right now that we have women in the bar. That we have members of the LGBTQ community in the bar. That we have Hispanics and African Americans in the bar. That we have Muslims in the bar. That we have foreign-trained attorneys in the bar. And therefore, a major part of our work over the last few years, both in the bar review and in our personal lives, has been to empower people who might otherwise have not had that opportunity.

So why am I talking about this today? I think if you've been watching us at all, or following along with what we do, you've probably noticed a trend. I tend to highlight the stories of people who otherwise would not have been probably very successful, but they overcame great hurdles in society and in their lives, to become members of the bar. That doesn't mean we don't interview straight white old men. We do. You can check out last week's episode for an example. But I also know that it's important that we be able to demonstrate that there are people who don't fit that mold who are becoming members of the bar and this is, I think, a major part of our purpose and our mission right now, and certainly for the foreseeable future.

So I want to say to those who are listening today, who may have felt marginalized or set aside or whose feeling is that because of your faith or your background or your skin color or your gender, that you are not being heard in the conversation about the law. The best way to get into the conversation is to become a member of the bar. I think it's great that you went to law school. I think it's awesome that you're in that position, and you've heard me say in other times and places that you're already a winner just by having gotten to the point where you can take the bar.

But you cannot fully participate in this conversation about the law and about the importance of the rule of law, whether it's dealing with social rights or economic justice or literally business as it operates day to day, unless you're in the game. And you can't get in the game unless you pass the bar exam. That's the way the game is set up. That's the way the rules are set up.

And truthfully, there are way too many people who are ripped off by the traditional approach to law school and to the bar exam. You went to a law school and you put yourself hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt for some of you, or at least a hundred thousand dollars in debt, and then you took a big box bar review and they did an information dump that just gave you all the information and then left you on your own, and so you were more in debt, more confused, and you took the bar and you failed.

I know that as I'm talking I've already described the circumstance for many of you that are listening today. If you're in that circumstance, I want you to know that it doesn't have to be that way. For years, we have helped people climb out of that circumstance and pass the bar and become productive members of their legal community. I'm so proud of those folks, and we've got a whole bunch of them featured on our testimonials page.

If you'd like to see some of those interviews and read what people have written as well,

you can go to celebrationbarreview.com/testimonials and you will see interviews as well as comments and responses from past students. I invite you to do that. I'd like you to see the kinds of amazing things that people are doing once they became members of the bar and the community and the legal community.

I guess my point in getting up on my soapbox today is to tell you that I'm not going to be quiet about this. I'm not going to sit back and let the rule of law be trampled. I'm not going to let people who otherwise would be qualified to be a member of the bar be cowed into silence, or to be told that they're less than or marginalized or not permitted into the bar. I am going to do, along with my staff, absolutely everything we can to help those individuals succeed. If you're in one of those groups, I certainly hope you'll consider our course.

If you're not in that group, I still hope you'll consider our course, because I believe as I always have that we're all better when we're diverse. If you don't believe a diverse bar is of value, don't take my course. Please, don't do it. I don't want you there, and I don't want you in the bar. But if you believe that there's room in the bar for people of a wide range of faiths, religion, sexual orientation, age and gender, then really, isn't it time that we work together to make something happen?

That's, I guess, my message today. I'm really troubled by what's happened, as I know many of you are. I'm scared for the future, I'm worried about what it means for our country, for our security, for our family, for our children and for our grandchildren. But I am assured by the fact that every week I see bright, new faces coming to me who are saying, "I want to be a member of the bar," and they represent the entire spectrum of the rainbow. And so, I'm really looking forward to the next year, to working with many of those individuals to help them pass their bars in California, in Texas, in Florida, in Georgia, in New York, in the Uniform Bar Exam, in the multi-state, wherever it might be. I hope that you feel the same way.

I recognize that what I've just said today is probably going to lose business for us, but I am confident that in the long run, the people who should be hearing this message will hear it. I'm also kind of thankful that the people who might hear this message and say, "That guy's a crackpot and I don't want anything to do with him," I really have reached that point in my life where I don't want your business and I say that without being mean, I just recognize that I'm no longer in a position to put up with crazy. And frankly, there are some crazy people in this country today and there are some people who, regardless of their political positions, have not acted very responsibly. Those are not the people that I want to help get into the bar.

So I don't care who you voted for in that sense, but I do care what you think about the rule of law and the importance of law, and the importance of being a member of the bar. If you value those things highly, as I do, then I'd love the chance to work with you on the bar exam. And as you'll hear on our interview today with Chigozie, there are a lot of people who really desperately want to be members of the bar, and I think nothing is

more exciting than to hear their stories, to find out what's going to be happening in their lives, to see the hurdles that they've overcome.

I really hope that you'll stick around and listen to our interview. It was a great one, and look forward to seeing you on our webinar soon and to seeing you on The Extra Mile. Thanks for your time and thanks for listening to me today. Let's jump into our interview now.