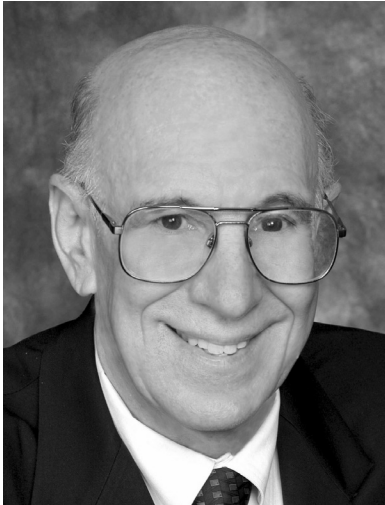




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Steven Pegalis believes that the attorney-client relationship continues after the verdict.

A special type of post-trial activity

Steven Pegalis, Pegalis & Erickson, LLC, Lake Success, N.Y.

By Stephen Kurczy

Like many professionals, attorney Steven Pegalis has decorated his office with photographs of the people who are special in his life. Not surprisingly, Pegalis' family is well-represented in the collage of faces, but the photo display also includes pictures of clients, such as Tina Patel, for whom Pegalis won a \$116 million verdict. Although Patel's case ended in 1998, Pegalis is still working for her. Several weeks ago, his office applied for the release of some of the funds, so the 18-year-old could purchase a home.

Pegalis' ongoing assistance of Patel trumpets a value that he'd like to see more attorneys embrace: caring for clients after a case ends. Pegalis believes that the attorney-client relationship never ends. Ever.

"It seems to me to be the right thing to do," says Pegalis, of Lake Success, N.Y.-based Pegalis & Erickson, LLC. "I'm comfortable that we're not only doing the morally right thing, but the ethically right thing," he says.

Pegalis believes that going that extra mile can build clientele, bolster authority within the courtroom, and enable an attorney to relate, on an ethical level, with clients, adversaries and the court.

Pegalis says that he recently heard from the parents of a former client who, with aid provided by a settlement that Pegalis negotiated, attended New York University as the most handicapped student ever accepted. The client now teaches at New York Law School. Pegalis also happens to be one of the school's adjunct professors. He teaches the ethics of attorney-client relationships, and his lectures are occasionally boosted by the presence of his former clients, who are introduced to drive home the idea that clients are people, not dollar signs.

"The students see that these are real people. They see a mother who advocates for her daughter and can understand that it's not hard to advocate for her. I think how to deal with clients, and what the attorney's ethical obligation is, should be a part of legal education," says Pegalis, named by *The National Law Journal* as one of the top 10 litigators of 2005.

Pegalis suggests assigning a paralegal to monitor clients and handle daily issues. He also suggests keeping those photos. Every day he feels the stare of a photo of New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg shaking the hand of a politically active post-graduate, once a physically handicapped boy with a bad gait and poor coordination,

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for whom Pegalis won a substantial verdict. Of course, Pegalis and the client remain in touch.

Pegalis & Erickson do not charge for this service. Thus, it requires staffing, money and time. Pegalis' partner, James Baydar, was recently in court fighting the department of social services over an application to have settlement funds released. The proceedings extracted an entire morning from Baydar's own trial.

"It can be burdensome," Pegalis says. But preparing your office to offer continued care is integral to a fulfilling career, he adds.

"I've always felt a part of the process is not only getting the money, but it's important for people who have been wronged to feel that the system works," Pegalis says. "Get past the idea that it takes time and a little overhead. In my own mind, that's small potatoes. What's the expression? 'Penny-wise, pound-foolish.' There's surely no downside to it. It's the proverbial win-win situation."

Outside the office

A member of the Lincoln Center's Metropolitan Opera, Pegalis attends about a dozen classical and operatic performances every year. His favorites are Giuseppe Verdi's *Don Carlos* and *Otello*.

"I'm looking forward to going with my grandchildren," says the father of three and grandfather of five. "I listen to music and visit my children. But not in that order."