



NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

College of Law



Northern Illinois University
COLLEGE OF LAW

32nd Annual
Francis X. Riley Lecture of Professionalism
March 26, 2026

**“PROFESSIONALISM:
LESSONS LEARNED IN PRACTICE”**

Presented by
The Honorable John C. Anderson

The Honorable John C. Anderson Illinois Appellate Court, Third District



John C. Anderson was born in 1970 and raised in Will County. He earned his Bachelor of Science in political science from Illinois State University in 1995, his Juris Doctor from University of Illinois-Chicago in 1999, his Master of Business Administration from University of Notre Dame in 2004, his Master of Science in political studies from University of Illinois-Springfield in 2012, and his Master of Laws from Duke University Law School in 2016.

Justice Anderson's early legal career includes clerkships for Justices John T. McCullough and Robert C. Buckley on the Illinois Appellate Court, and Justice Thomas L. Kilbride on the Illinois Supreme Court. He later worked at a commercial litigation boutique, and then worked at Thompson Coburn, LLP.

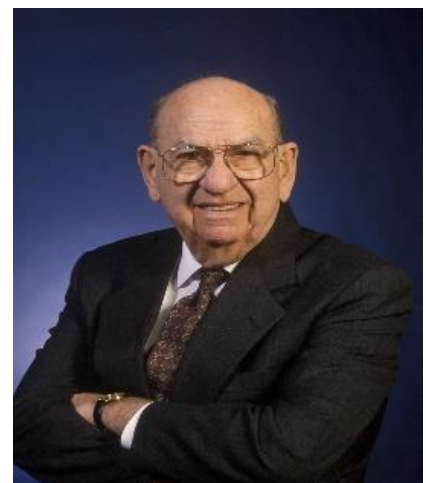
Justice Anderson served on the Will County Board of Commissioners, and became a circuit judge in 2010. He spent most of his time on the circuit bench hearing chancery and other civil cases. He was elected to the Illinois Appellate Court in November 2024.

Justice Anderson has served on a variety of Illinois Supreme Court boards and committees, including the Lawyers' Trust Fund, the Judicial Retirement System, and the Rules Committee (the latter of which he was chairman). He also served as an editor for the judicial benchbook on mortgage foreclosures.

He was named "Judicial Officer of the Year" by the Illinois State Crime Commission and helped raise tens of millions of dollars for various legal aid organizations. He has published several articles on various legal topics.

Francis X. Riley Lecture on Professionalism

The Francis X. Riley Lecture on Professionalism was established in 1994 to honor Professor Emeritus Francis X. Riley, who devoted his life to the law and legal education. Professor Riley passed away on September 14, 2006. He was 93. The Lecture Series brings distinguished speakers to the Northern Illinois University College of Law to discuss current issues relating to the legal profession. It also continues to serve as part of Professor Riley's legacy at the College of Law and within the legal community.



Professionalism: Lessons Learned in Practice

Presented by Justice John C. Anderson

Summary:

This presentation explores the essential role of professionalism in the practice of law, emphasizing that it extends far beyond basic etiquette. It highlights why professionalism is critical to a lawyer's credibility, effectiveness, and long-term success, often shaping outcomes more than technical legal skill alone. Through practical, experience-based lessons; including guarding one's reputation, understanding audiences, managing clients, maintaining professionalism in an increasingly informal world, and learning from mistakes, the program offers actionable guidance for navigating real-world legal practice. Ultimately, the presentation underscores that professionalism is foundational to building trust, sustaining a meaningful career, and serving clients and the legal system with integrity.

Presentation Outline:

I. Introduction

- Opening remarks and acknowledgment of audience
- Recognition of the demands on law students (academic, professional, personal pressures)
- Framing the topic: "Professionalism" as a frequently used but often vaguely understood concept

II. Professionalism Is Not Just Etiquette

- Distinguishing etiquette from character
- Professionalism revealed under pressure
- Tested when losing, stressed, or facing difficult opponents
- Judicial perspective: adversity reveals character

III. Why Professionalism Matters More Than You Think

- Legal system built on trust (clients, courts, public)
- Lawyers as advocates and officers of the court
- Practical impacts: efficiency, reduced conflict, better outcomes
- Broader implications: public confidence and rule of law

IV. Ten Practical Tips

A. Guard Your Reputation

- Reputation is a lawyer's most valuable asset
- Honesty, reliability, composure under pressure
- Long-term consequences for opportunities and credibility

B. Litigation Is Not Always About Doing Battle

- Not every issue is worth fighting
- Focus on advancing client interests
- Value of collegiality and communication

- C. Know Your Audience—and Your Audience’s Audience**
 - Multiple audiences: partners, clients, judges
 - Importance of timing and workflow
 - Anticipating how work will be used and perceived

- D. Do Not Let Professionalism Suffer in an Age of Informality**
 - Changes in form vs. constants in substance
 - Risks of casual tone
 - Professionalism as reliability and integrity

- E. Professionalism Extends to Non-Lawyers**
 - Respect for staff and all system participants
 - Ethical and practical importance
 - Daily interactions shape reputation

- F. Preparation Is Respect**
 - Preparation as core professionalism
 - Signals competence and respect
 - Benefits: credibility, calm and confidence

- G. Mistakes Happen—Deal With Them Properly**
 - Mistakes are inevitable
 - Respond with honesty and correction
 - Maintain credibility through transparency

- H. It Is Not Always About Winning**
 - Ethical limits on advocacy
 - Success includes fairness and integrity
 - Judgment in advising clients

- I. Manage Your Client**
 - Clients need guidance, not just advocacy
 - Honest advice and expectation management
 - Importance of independence and judgment

- J. Do Not Be Discouraged by Your Failures**
 - Failure is inevitable
 - Learn and persist
 - Professional growth through adversity

V. Conclusion

Past Francis X. Riley Lecturers

2025	The Honorable Timothy C. Evans	2008	Professor Emeritus Gordon B. Shneider
2024	NIU Law Deans Strickman, Alfini, Pernel, and Rosato	2007	Justice Modibo Ocran
2023	Hon. James Snyder ('88)	2006	Patrick J. Fitzgerald
2022	Sonni C. Williams ('99) and Kendra Abercrombie	2005	Jim Ryan, Esquire
2021	The Honorable William J. Haddad	2004	Professor Bruce R. Jacob
2019	Mary Robinson	2003	The Honorable Thomas L. Kilbride
2018	The Honorable Bonnie M. Wheaton ('78)	2002	Professor Robert F. Drinan
2017	Senator Toi W. Hutchinson ('14)	2001	Nancy L. Kaszak ('78)
2016	Dean Emeritus James J. Alfini	2000	Professor Richard C. Boldt
2015	The Honorable Charles R. Wilson	1999	Cheryl Niro ('80)
2014	Dr. Kenneth C. Chessick ('84)	1998	Jerold S. Solovy
2013	Professor Carole Silver	1997	Professor David B. Wilkins
2012	Lawrence J. Fox	1996	The Honorable Abner J. Mikva
2011	Cherilyn Murer ('78)	1995	George E. Bushnell, Jr.
2010	Lisa Madigan		
2009	The Honorable John W. Darrah		



Huskies United 2026!

April 1-2 from 12 pm to 12 pm

We hope you will join us to support the College of Law's mission during the Huskies United Day of Giving 2026! We have some great challenges thanks to the generous support of College of Law family and friends.

Cant wait? Donate early to help reach our fundraising goals to support the College of Law and our students. Anyone who donates \$25 or more will also receive your choice of a custom pair of NIU socks from two options. Need both pair? Donate \$50 or more!

Thank you in advance for your support!



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