

Words Poorly Used #90 — Words Used by Lawyers

In view of the recent surge of new persons of legal letters descending on Sodom-on-the-Potomac, perhaps we can stand on the shoulders of giants by reviewing a selection of notable quotations regarding the quarreling class.

It may be that the jury would incline to regard a practising lawyer as a man of probity whose word was prima facie worthy of belief. But the belief of lawyers in their own probity is not universally shared, and there are those who believe them to be capable of almost any chicanery or sharp practice.

— Lord Bingham of Cornhill

We have the heaviest concentration of lawyers on Earth—one for every five-hundred Americans; three times as many as are in England, four times as many as are in West Germany, twenty-one times as many as there are in Japan. We have more litigation, but I am not sure that we have more justice. No resources of talent and training in our own society, even including the medical care, is more wastefully or unfairly distributed than legal skills. Ninety percent of our lawyers serve 10 percent of our people. We are over-lawyered and under-represented.

— President Jimmy Carter

A jury consists of twelve persons chosen to decide who has the better lawyer.

— Robert Frost

The function of the lawyer is to preserve a sceptical relativism in a society hell-bent for absolutes. The worse the society, the more law there will be. In Hell there will be nothing but law and due process will

be meticulously observed.

— Grant Gilmore

Lawyer — One who protects us against robbers by taking away the temptation.

— H.L. Mencken

Let's ask ourselves: Does America really need 70 percent of the world's lawyers? Is it healthy for our economy to have 18 million new lawsuits coursing through the system annually? Is it right that people with disputes come up against staggering expense and delay?

— Vice President Dan Quayle

A common and not necessarily apocryphal example portrays a solo practitioner starved for business in a small town. A second lawyer then arrives, and they both prosper.

— Deborah L. Rhode

About half the practice of a decent lawyer consists of telling would-be clients that they are damned fools and should stop.

— Elihu Root

What are lawyers really? To me a lawyer is basically the person that knows the rules of the country. We're all throwing the dice, playing the game, moving our pieces around the board, but if there's a problem, the lawyer is the only person that has actually read the inside of the top of the box.

— Jerry Seinfeld

The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.

— William Shakespeare

Is it not remarkable that the common repute which we all give to attorneys in the general is exactly opposite to that which every man gives to his own attorney in particular? Whom does anybody trust so implicitly as he trusts his own attorney? And yet is it not the case that the body of attorneys is supposed to be the most roguish body in existence?

— Anthony Trollope

[Lawyers] can make the worse appear the better cause, as though they were fresh from Leontine schools, and have been known to wrest from reluctant juries triumphant verdicts of acquittal for their clients, even when those clients, as often happens, were clearly and unmistakably innocent.

— Oscar Wilde

An incompetent attorney can delay a trial for years or months. A competent attorney can delay one even longer.

— Evelle J. Younger

When there are too many policemen, there can be no individual liberty, when there are too many lawyers, there can be no justice, and when there are too many soldiers, there can be no peace.

— Lin Yutang

I do not say that all lawyers are bad, but I do maintain that the general tendency is bad: standing up in a court for whichever side has paid you, affecting warmth and conviction, and doing everything you

can to win the case, whatever your private opinion may be, will soon dull any fine sense of honour. The mercenary soldier is not a valued creature, but at least he risks his life, whereas these men merely risk their next fee.

— Patrick O'Brian

If there were no bad people, there would be no good lawyers.

— Charles Dickens

No great idea in its beginning can ever be within the law. How can it be within the law? The law is stationary. The law is fixed. The law is a chariot wheel which binds us all regardless of conditions or place or time.

— Emma Goldman

A lawyer is a person who writes a 10,000-word document and calls it a "brief."

— Franz Kafka

A good lawyer knows the law; a clever one takes the judge to lunch.

— Mark Twain

The minute you read something that you can't understand, you can almost be sure that it was drawn up by a lawyer.

— Will Rogers

It is the trade of lawyers to question everything, yield nothing, and to talk by the hour

— Thomas Jefferson

Lawyers enjoy a little mystery, you know. Why, if everybody came forward and told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth straight out, we should all retire to the workhouse.

— Dorothy L. Sayers

A countryman between two lawyers is like a fish between two cats.

— Benjamin Franklin

Lawyers are men whom we hire to protect us from lawyers.

— Elbert Hubbard

I think we may class the lawyer in the natural history of monsters.

— John Keats

There are three sorts of lawyers – able, unable and lamentable.

— Robert Smith Surtees

The power of the lawyer is in the uncertainty of the law.

— Jeremy Bentham

A chief called Lawyer, because he was a great talker, took the lead in the council, and sold nearly all the Nez Perce country.

— Chief Joseph

As a lawyer, as a private citizen, you see a lot of injustice. You see a lot of people who should have been punished and are not, and people who were punished wrongfully are not vindicated. Fiction is sort of a way to set the record straight, and let people at least believe that justice can be achieved and the right outcomes can occur.”

— David Baldacci

A lawyer with his briefcase can steal more than a hundred men with guns.

— Mario Puzo

The doctor sees all the weakness of mankind; the lawyer all the wickedness, the theologian all the stupidity.

— Arthur Schopenhauer

I am sorry to say that sometimes matters of very small importance waste a good deal of precious time, by the long and repeated speeches and chicanery of gentlemen who will not wholly throw off the lawyer even in Congress.

— William Whipple

An eminent lawyer cannot be a dishonest man. Tell me a man is dishonest, and I will answer he is no lawyer. He cannot be, because he is careless and reckless of justice; the law is not in his heart, is not the standard and rule of his conduct.

— Daniel Webster

Of course, some would say if you have a performing inclination, then you should become a lawyer. That's a platform we use, or a priest. You know, anywhere you lecture and pontificate to people.

— Rowan Atkinson

Maybe these gems will put you in a calmer frame of mind as we contemplate the perfect storm that is descending on the District. Special thanks to Wikiquote.org, AZQuotes.com, and IZQuotes.com