

Not Afraid to Go to Trial: Thadd Llaurado on Personal Injury Litigation

There's not one set formula for excelling at litigation. But certain characteristics help, according to Thadd Llaurado, an award-winning civil trial lawyer.

BY SHANNON GREEN

What are the characteristics of a good litigator? According to Thadd Llaurado, a good litigator isn't afraid to take a case all the way to trial – but also needs an extensive support system.

Llaurado is the managing and senior partner with Milwaukee-based Murphy & Prachthaus, a firm that exclusively handles plaintiff's personal injury claims. He leads their trial practice team, covering severe and catastrophic injury cases involving construction defects, vehicle crashes, and defective products. With the firm for more than 38 years, Llaurado has litigated cases not only in Wisconsin but also in Minnesota, Illinois, California, Texas, Arkansas, Indiana,

Kentucky, Utah, and Pennsylvania.

In December 2024, Llaurado was honored as the 2024 Robert L. Habush Trial Lawyer of the Year by the Wisconsin Association for Justice.

Here are some of his thoughts on practicing litigation.

What makes a great litigator?

Good trial lawyers need to be authentic to themselves, creative, have fortitude, enjoy and understand hard work, and have integrity and humility. And good trial lawyers cannot be afraid to go to trial.

Good trial lawyers must be especially good communicators. This includes explaining to clients how the process works every step of the way, the risks involved in going to trial, and also that going to trial may or may not be the best option. Trial lawyers must also communicate with the judge and the jury in a cogent, logical, and persuasive fashion.

What is the most interesting case you have worked on?

There are many, so picking one is difficult. One particularly interesting case involved a construction defect case involving a heating and air conditioning duct held to the ceiling by metal wires 30 feet above the floor. One of the wires holding the air duct came apart, causing the entire air duct to fall and hit my client in the head, causing a severe brain injury.

There were conflicting stories of why and how it happened. We used scientific and metallurgical analysis to clarify the

liability aspect of the case, including that a wire must have been cut by another contractor, which caused the duct work to fall. There were also significant medical-legal issues regarding the damages the person sustained. The case eventually went to trial before a jury and then to the court of appeals.

What advice do you have for young lawyers who want to become great litigators?

First and foremost, a young lawyer should find a great mentor to show them the path to being a great litigator. Also, since a litigation practice inevitably involves sacrifices made to the lawyer's personal life, you need the support of loved ones, such as family or significant others. And of course, you need the support of a good group of colleagues.

Most of all, a young lawyer needs to try cases. There is nothing like being in the courtroom to give you the confidence and fortitude to try your cases. Young lawyers should look for opportunities with firms who will allow them to go to trial. Many organizations offer mock trial programs or trial colleges to help new lawyers work on key skills before their first trial. In addition, court calendars are publicly available, and young lawyers can go watch other trials to help get some experience. **WL**

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