

"Reflections on Imperfection" by Pedrick Lecturer

By Amy E. Wong



The world is riddled with imperfections. You can be among the best and the brightest but end up begging for loose change in some dark alleyway. Beyond your own efforts, success is contingent on your environment, society, and God-given attributes. For instance, it is a widely known fact that females and minorities are disadvantaged when compared to males and whites.

Martin D. Ginsburg, professor at Georgetown University Law Center, spoke at the 12th annual Willard H. Pedrick Lecture at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law. In his speech, "Some Reflections on Imperfection," Ginsburg underscored life's unpredictability. He said, "In an imperfect world, it is foolish, indeed irrational, to believe that goodness and merit will reliably achieve a desired outcome."

He continued, "In an imperfect world, serious things do go seriously wrong. Stuff happens. As a rational person, you would not embark on a course unless you had first thought hard about what might go wrong and had planned an appropriate response."

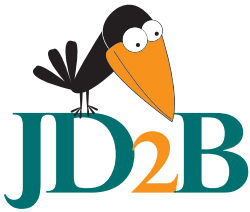
Martin Ginsburg has inside knowledge of life's "imperfections." His wife, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and his friend, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, have a lot in common. They both graduated at the tops of their law school classes; no law firm would hire either of them upon graduation; they are both women.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sandra Day O'Connor did everything they could to succeed, but because they live in a flawed world, their gender set them up for failure. Their chances of competing against their male counterparts were hindered—an imperfection of today's legal job market that many of us still struggle against.

Martin Ginsburg asked, "Was it a good thing or a bad thing?"

Although Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sandra Day O'Connor were rejected by top firms in the private sector, they both enjoyed a different type of success. According to Martin Ginsburg, "No one could know that rejection by conventional law firms ultimately would prove for these unique individuals to be an amazingly good thing."

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Each turn of events in Ruth Bader Ginsburg's life has been unexpected and constructive. She didn't get the gig on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit she had pursued. Instead, she landed a position on the District of Columbia Circuit in 1979-a position in which she generated much buzz as a result of her many noteworthy accomplishments.

After a long struggle and complicated nomination process, Ginsburg finally joined the Supreme Court in 1993, with support from her husband and legal-scholar friend.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sandra Day O'Connor are two modern-day examples of women who have broken new and exciting ground. Other female and minority politicians such as Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and Condoleezza Rice are also fighting to narrow the gap that separates them from success. Their journeys are modern-day testaments to what can be accomplished.

Ginsburg's speech highlighted the accomplishments of exceptional women. It also underscored the importance of acknowledging and working around societal limitations. It reminded me of that Robert Frost poem "The Road Not Taken." Hopefully, as these courageous leaders pave the path toward equality, the exception will become the norm.

In the meantime, Ginsburg advised, "It is wiser to look around corners, to anticipate what can go wrong, and to plan on that eventuality just in case."