Remarks Delivered for Dick Kummert’s Memorial
April 29, 2012
University of Washington School of Law

Professor.  Associate Dean.  Executive Director.  The D. Wayne and Anne Gittinger Professor of Law.  Kummert.  Dick.  ROK.

The number of monikers we all have used over the years to describe Richard O. Kummert is representative of the multi-faceted traits – and I would say gifts – that Dick brought to our community.

I first met Dick as Professor Kummert when I took his Corporations class in law school.  What possessed me to take the class, I don’t know -- since, as many of you know, I came to law school not wanting to pursue a traditional law practice -- I had taken to heart John Haley’s advice to me as a 1L to not take a class just because it would be on the bar exam.

And, yes, Ron, I know – I should have taken tax (a piece of advice Professor Haley also gave me I might add).

I sat in the back of the class – mainly, I suppose, because I was intimidated by the subject – and, perhaps, a little bit by the Professor…who had this mind boggling grasp of the subject.

From my perch at the back of 109/129, I would wonder from time-to-time why I had chosen to take the class – but, at the same time, I found myself surprisingly intrigued and drawn into the material.  Indeed, I’ve still been known at times to expound “we must proceed carefully here or they may pierce the corporate veil!”

I actually earned a high grade in the class, which probably put me in good stead with Dick as he and I entered down the path of a close working relationship not less than a year later as Assistant Dean and Associate Dean.

I should be clear, though -- it put me in good stead – not because Dick would have respected me any differently if I hadn’t earned a high grade, but because it gave me some self-assurance that I could at least step in the arena with this intellectual giant.
It was in this capacity, as Associate Dean, that I knew and worked with Dick the most. We served together both under Ron’s leadership of the school as well as for a short while under Joe Knight’s tenure as dean.

For much of that time, I was head of the law school budgets and Dick was serving as Executive Director of the Law School Foundation, so our coordination and work together was constant and daily. This was of course the time when we were working to secure the public funding for the new law school building -- as well as the required private dollars to complete this marvelous project.

Dick and I also undertook during this time an endeavor to literally tear down to its base the whole law school budgeting system and then we rebuilt it from top to bottom. The result was a system that broke down longstanding barriers that had existed between the law school, the Foundation and the law library – which in turn provided a solid foundation for the school to move forward into a new era of expansion and opportunity.

When I remember back to that Corporations class all those years ago, and reflect on Dick’s teaching style, I realize in retrospect that it is representative of how he conducted much of his work: quiet and unobtrusive, but powerfully present in impact and effect.

So for just a moment, I’d like to highlight what I think are some of the other monikers that come to mind when I think of Dick:

**Truth Sayer**

Dick had an uncanny ability to cut to the heart of an issue – I wouldn’t say mercilessly, but certainly with the skill of an adept surgeon.

This attribute was driven home to me no more fully than after my husband and I purchased a home together shortly after we were married -- this was the first house purchase for me. I remember coming back to the law school, sitting in Dick’s office as I excitedly told him we had just signed the papers for the closing on our new home.

I will never forget Dick looking at me, and with that flawless delivery - saying “congratulations, you are now an indentured servant of the law school.”

Well my face must have fallen markedly as the reality of his words hit me – I mean, having a mortgage is totally different from paying rent. He suddenly backed off of the comment and duly congratulated me on our new purchase.

But the comment stuck with me….and it stuck with me because of another trait I will highlight:

**Perceptive**

One of my favorite things Dick used to say when we were having discussions about navigating the intricacies of law school administration and faculty politics was:
“My wife doesn’t believe me that I work in a building full of conflict averse people.”

The insight in that comment is profound. People assume that lawyers like to argue about everything – and that may be true, but we do that when we’re advocating on behalf of someone else -- engaging in conflict where it is for something for ourselves, though, is not always a place we like to go.

As the head of the organization that leads the lawyers of this state now, I often find myself channeling Dick as I coach non-lawyer managers to understand and navigate this community and environment that they are now operating in.

That perceptive insight by Dick so many years ago has helped me immeasurably as I’ve moved forward in my career -- leading lawyers and leading non lawyers in a lawyer community.

**Conceptual**

They say you can take the boy out of the country, but you can’t take the country out of the boy. So was this true with Professor Kummert. That is, you can take the professor out of the classroom, but you can’t always take the classroom out of the professor.

As adept of an administrator as Dick was – and he was – he sometimes would engage in these duties through his professor lens.

I always enjoyed the intellectual jousts Dick and I would have around the policy and sometime theoretical implications of the administrative decisions we were making – but at times I would sometimes find myself having to pull him back to the pragmatic so I could understand what it was exactly he thought we should do.

As you know, the role of the Assistant Deans in the law school’s administration is to oversee the staff and operations. Of course staff work closely with all of the law school administration, so on occasion I would encounter a staff member emerging from Dick’s office – and I think the best way to describe the look on the staff member’s face might be – *bewilderment.*

Having had enough mileage with Dick to have learned his cadence, my exchange with the staff member would often go something like this:

Paula: Did you just meet with Dick?

Staff member: Yes.

Paula: Not sure what he was saying?

Staff member: Not really.

Paula: You just need to tell Dick, during the conversation “I don’t understand what you’re saying.” And I promise, he’ll restate it in a different way that you can understand.

This is how I had learned to -- pull him back down…..
And I think my advice to these staff members really leads to the last characteristic I’d like to emphasize:

**Kind**

As *unintentionally* intimidating as Dick was, he was one of the kindest people this community has ever known.

Dick was gentle, quiet and welcoming.

And he had the rare ability to elevate the voice of those who might not otherwise be heard.

Compassion circumscribed every task he undertook, whether it was organizing the morass of quarterly class schedules, working through a thorny student issue, or reviewing admission applications.

Diversity and access were issues that Dick was well ahead of the curve on -- and his thoughtful presence on these issues helped to bring this law school into the vanguard of legal education institutions in this regard.

Over the years since leaving the law school, I often called on Dick to provide me with his wise and thoughtful counsel.

Dick was my teacher, my mentor, my colleague, and, deepest in my heart, a friend and constant source of professional and emotional support.

Words alone will never capture or express the important role he played in my life, in our community -- and, indeed, for our profession.

But I take comfort knowing that his legacy will continue on -- as it will continue to shape and bolster our ideals -- our goals -- and our values as a community.

Thank you, Dick.