

Judge Thomas Sholts
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Occasionally we are all reminded that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Good intentions by themselves are inadequate to promote, create and maintain the social values and activities that bolster and refine civilization. Good intentions, coupled with good common sense, conservative judgement, pride, family unity, integrity, industriousness, intelligence, innovative and progressive attitudes, strong convictions of fairness still do not pave the way to heaven, but they do create social harmony and contentment. Judge Thomas Sholts, a self-described perfectionist, is deed a civilized man who strives to maintain these virtues, hoping that the contributions both in his personal and professional life may someday bring mankind a good life that all can enjoy.

The 51-year-old jurist grew up in Appleton, Wisconsin; Judge Sholts earned a bachelor's degree in 1954 in American history. He minored in political science and government. After being admitted to law school at that university, he transferred to New York University Law School, where he graduated in 1957. While living in New York, the young Thomas Sholts worked in a corporate trust department for a WallStreet bank. Decided to move on to Florida in 1959, Thomas Sholts worked as an insurance adjuster for United States Guaranty Insurance Company during his one year residency wait for admission to The Florida Bar.

After his admission to The Florida Bar in 1960, Thomas Sholts went to work in the County Solicitor's office, and later for Gibson and Reese. Judge Sholts entered private practice for himself in 1964, engaging in both civil and criminal trial practice until appointment to the circuit court in mid-1972. During his tenure, he served as chief judge for the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit from 1975 to 1977 and actively participated in formulating the local administrative rules now in force in Palm Beach County. Still in the prime of a distinguished career, Judge Sholts offers the following viewpoints.

VIEWPOINTS

Philosophy: "I run my professional life a little differently than my private life. I try to run the court with a rule of reason and not to act impetuously. You have to wait and hear it all before you make up your mind. Over the years I think I have developed a philosophy of being conservative in judgement and waiting. I speak less now and listen better."

The Job: "The job has made me more understanding. I've got a wonderful education here. There are times when feel the world is going to hell. The quest for materialism has eroded those things that are of real value in life the respect of children for parents, and faith, truth and love between husband and wife. I don't believe that about all people but I see the trend going that way, and it bothers me. Occasionally, sitting here, I get to do something about it on a case by case basis, although I'm no avenging angel or anything like that. I don't think I have a doomsday philosophy because there are still a lot of good people working to maintain the good values that I hope will exist forever."

Three Essential Elements of a Good Judge: "The first element is absolute integrity couples with good common sense. The second element would be industriousness- the willingness to work to get the job done, to go to the nth degree to make sure you do it right. The third quality is intelligence."

Frame of Mind: "You have to start out with the basic premise that 50% of the population believe you are right and the other 50% believe you are wrong. Every case has two sides to it. I

do not mind the criticism of the media. They have the first amendment right to speak out, although sometimes you get the feeling the media's criticism is not constructive; I hope it is but I wonder at times. I certainly welcome constructive criticism. With eleven years on the bench I know I cannot please everyone. You must do what in your mind is right and reasonable based on the evidence."

Request to the Bar: "When attorneys come to court, I wish they would come prepared. For example, we (the bar committees) have worked very hard to adopt the uniform pretrial procedure. I have noticed that lawyers are paying less attention to that procedure. I think it is excellent. Supposedly, it gets everyone prepared thirty days prior to the time we hold the trial. It enables parties to look at their cases and to settle them without litigation.

I also wish attorneys would proofread pleadings before signing them. I have kept a collection of pleadings over the years that I use as illustrations in speeches. They are both humorous and ludicrous. If an insignificant order with an error is submitted, I might sign it rather than line it out, redo it or send it back. Sometimes, I am kind of ashamed to put my name by some of these orders, but it gets the job done rather than creating a problem."

Criticism: "I tend to be somewhat of a perfectionist. Some lawyers just out of law school start a practice and have no one to turn to get advice as to trial practice. I do try to guide the younger lawyers along. My criticism is always constructive and never destructive unless someone does something willfully violative of the rules. I want the lawyers to be the best lawyers they possibly can be. They can only learn that by the experience of having done it."