

Leslie Kendrick:

I, I really appreciate being asked to do this and I had a problem, and that problem was: What in the world am I going to talk to you all about? What am I going to send you off into the world with here? All of the good advice has been given already: wear sunscreen. Don't go chasing waterfalls. And never go with a hippie to a second location. There's really nothing else to say. So what does it leave me to leave you with? So I thought about it, and I thought, I think I have a set of tools that I can give you that I hope will be helpful to you. Somewhere down the road, and they're called the three P's. Now, what are the three P's you ask and why do we need them? What question is it that the three P's are trying to answer? The question that they're trying to answer is: Why is everything so hard? Now, I say, why is everything so hard, and there are different types of hard. I look at all of you, and I think my doctor friends would look at you and say, this is a group of well-dressed, well-fed individuals in no acute distress in doctor talk. Things are pretty good for you. Now I say most of you, cause maybe some of you are going through something. Maybe you are in acute distress. Maybe you're struggling with the loss of a loved one. The sickness of a loved one, the end of a relationship. You never really know what's going on with other people. So maybe some of you are in acute distress and all of us sometimes deal with exogenous forces, crises that come into our lives and challenge us. In the fall of 2019, for example, I taught 110 of you in Torts class. As we bade each other farewell, after the end of finals already halfway across the world, a virus had emerged that was going to affect basically the rest of your time here. That was a challenge that we all met, and met together. And there are people in the world all the time that are dealing with crises and what we can do every day is give thanks when it's not us and try to help the ones who are suffering that crisis. I hope that what I say here can help you in those times too, but that's not really the kind of hard that I'm talking about today. I'm talking about more kind of everyday hard and you could think, why should things be hard for us? Why should things be hard for you? This is a great time in your life. You're about to become professionals. That's not one of the P words I'm gonna talk about actually. It starts with a P, but it's not on the list. Another is this one which has become kind of a hot-button word, privilege. You are all privileged in the sense that you have some amazing, sterling credentials coming out of here, and you're getting ready to be members of the bar, which is a, is an exclusive organization. You may have had struggles in your life and I'm sure you have in other ways, but there are certain types of opportunity that you're leaving this place with. That's that's pretty nice, right? That's pretty good thing about your life. You may even think if you're a member of the bar and you've got these sterling credentials from high-ranked institutions, you may be members of the establishment. You may even dare I say, be members of what my little sister used to call the "E light." Now that's why comes of being a kid and reading a book and learning a word from a book rather than learning it from hearing people say it, which is also probably a sign that you're not a member of the "e light" cause we, we never heard anyone use that word, but never apologizing for learning words out of books, right? We all do it sometimes. These are words that could also apply to you. So I've thrown in a couple E words too. That's not what I'm talking about today either though. So you know when you're, you're this member of the "E light," you've got all these wonderful privileges and opportunities at your fingertips. Why do I say that things can sometimes be hard? Even so, this is

kind of everyday kind of hard. Well, sometimes those things can themselves be part of the problem, as I say, you're privileged or you're professional or you're a member of the "E light." Some of you think, yes, I worked hard for that. And I'm finally here. And some of you think I always have been, of course, and a lot more of you are thinking, no, that's not me. I'm a rebel. I'm a renegade. I'm not a member of the establishment. That's not me. And maybe you're struggling a little bit with your self concept with your self-concept because you've got different parts of yourself that all inhabit the same being. And even if you don't see yourself as a member of an establishment or as privileged, probably some other people are gonna see you that way. Maybe your clients are gonna see you that way. Maybe that's part of what they look to you for and part of what they depend on you for. So you're going to have these different parts of your life, as you become professionals, that are new and different, that you have to incorporate into your sense of self identity. And I think that's just one example of the type of difficulty that I'm talking about that will come to you. Maybe not every day, but various times during your life, as you put your professional life together. You have to figure out who you are and how you relate to the people around you and the institutions that you inhabit. And in doing that, I want to talk to you about the three P's, because I think they are both the problem in some way, and the solution. The three P's I'm talking about are principles, people and places you have all three of them, all three of them are important to you. Sometimes they're our problem. Sometimes I think they can be our salvation and what can make us, uh, feel better our ourselves, and also make this world a better place and improve it a little bit. So we're gonna talk about all of them individually and we're gonna talk about them together. I say you have all of them and it's important that you have all of them. If you have only principles and no allegiance to person or place, you are a creature only of ideas and you might be able to hold onto your ideological purity, rejecting all that don't agree exactly with you on all things, but that's gonna be a pretty lonely place. You're gonna find very few people in the world who agree with you on everything. So you can do that and you'll be taking the purity of your principles and privileging it beyond other things. On the flip side, though, if you let go of your principles and you care only about people and places, you are taking a different value to the extreme, you're taking loyalty to the extreme. You're letting go of any type of internal commitment and pledging your fealty and your loyalty only to those people that you care about or only those places that you care about. And that too is a mistake. At that point, you might as well be in the mafia. And I don't think any of you came to UVA Law to be in the mafia. So we have to think about how these things relate to each other, how principles, people and place relate to each other. And I want to talk about each one in turn. Principles. I think some of you have heard me say this before, but this is what I would task you with on the principles front. Here's you, one of your jobs in life is to figure out what you think, what you believe. That's not a static process. It never ends. It's not a sign of maturity, not to change your mind. Sometimes it's worth changing your mind. So I don't suggest that there's an accomplishment, an end goal where you figured it all out, but constantly you're thinking about where you stand on things. But in addition to that, you have to figure out something else. You have to figure out what ideas you disagree with, but respect; what ideas you disagree with, but tolerate, you respect in that small R sense that you tolerate them without giving them that big R robust respect; and what ideas you reject and think cannot be tolerated or respected, cannot be respected in either

sense of the word, which ideas are beyond for you. And they're not all this; you cannot and should not agree with everything, but nor does the world look like this, where everything that you disagree with, you reject entirely. There are different forms of disagreement. And it's actually just as important to figure out how you disagree with something as it is to figure out that you disagree with it. Let's talk about people. Cause this is where things start to get complicated. Principles are ideas. And we have all here in law school, played on the playing field of ideas, thought about pure ideas. But most of the time in the real world, principles are refracted through people. They're embodied in people, people that you have relationships with. So even if you figure out where you stand, as a matter of principle, that doesn't answer the question of how you're going to relate to people. Here you are again. And when, and when you're in life, you may come across people that are so far away from your principles. Maybe even hold principles that you reject generously, but you have other types of relationships with them. They're your little brother. They're your grandmother. They're your roommate. They're the friend that picked you up off the ground when you were at your lowest of low, or your co-worker, who's been in the foxhole with you and has backed you up every step of the way on something where you guys work together. Maybe you have allies who in the way that the term allies started have different interests, share some values, but implement them in different ways. And maybe they're not gonna go where you wanna go on those values at certain times, but you still share them. And you do that hard work of figuring out where you're, where you're together and where you have to disagree. Maybe you have people that actually you see almost almost a hundred percent eye to eye with, but somehow whenever you're with that person, they make you feel small. I'm not telling you what to do in any of these situations. But I am asking you to think about them and to recognize that some of the difficulty that we come upon as people is because of trying to live our principles and have relationships with people at the same time. And just as in the situation with the principles where everything that you don't accept, you don't have to strenuously reject. There's not a right answer on how to deal with any of these questions. There's just the question and it's hard. And those relationships are part of what make life hard. Let's talk about places. The thing about places is you may have, you know, some burning deep love for some landscape. Maybe, you know, you love a particular cliff or something like that, but most places are made up of people. I mean, let's be honest. Most of what you love about a particular place in most cases is about the people in those places, which means things are automatically gonna get complicated basically immediately. Cause in places you don't just have a binary relationship to worry about. You have all sorts of relationships to worry about. You could be working for an institution that has hundreds of employees or is a multinational that's spread across a bunch of different places. Or even if you're in a small nonprofit, you've got people there, every one of which has their own point of view. Now you have to, you have to regulate how your principles go and figure out how they fit in within a much larger set of relationships. And here too, I can't tell you how to do it. I can just say that gets complicated. And just as in the case of the principles and the people, if you just stick with exactly what you agree with or exactly what's comfortable for you, you're gonna be living on a very small island and no man is an island. You're gonna be that proverbial class of one that we always talk about in equal protection law, but doesn't actually exist. It doesn't really exist. I mean, what who's ever a class of one, because

we're meant to be in relationships and that hard work of working them through that happens in places too. You will find places of work where you're disappointed in the way they implement your values and their values sometimes. You will find places of work where you're not always happy with your clients. You could even be working for the nonprofit that's exactly on your same page, about 95% of things, but their budget constraints or their donors or whoever or whatever is gonna constrain, how they can implement what's already miraculously super close to your vision and you'll have decisions to make about how to deal with that. But in doing that as with your personal relationships, you can think about the fact that you don't wanna be an island and that maybe you wanna build out and possibly try to improve the place you're in while also maintaining those relationships. It's very hard to know how to do that. And sometimes it's time to walk away, but if you can at least recognize what I have here is a struggle between my principles and the place, or my principles and a person, you can at least name the problem and figure out what to do about it and recognize that either total purity of principle or total loyalty is a problematic answer in a lot of cases. Not always, but a lot of the time. So I I've said all of this in black and white, but I think my point is largely that a lot of things aren't, that most things aren't. That the types of thinking that you have to do about your principles, your people and your places is often gonna lead you, uh, to non-black-and-white solutions. Now what's the opposite of black and white. I don't think it's gray. I don't think I'm saying here. Life is a gray area, have fun. Um, although I don't know if, uh, if you've ever seen the coloring book for lawyers, someone sent my other sister this, uh, a long time ago. This, this is a, it's a story of a lawyer who's, uh, and like a day in his life. This is my train. It takes me to the office every day, you meet lots of interesting people on the train, color, them all gray. I reject that view of the law and I reject that view of life. I think a lot of it's not black and white, but that doesn't mean that it's gray. The opposite of black and white is multicolor. And as I send you off in the world, what I wish for you is a multicolor life, a technicolor life, a pyrotechnic life. I want it to be wonderful in all of its messiness and messy in all of its wonder. And as I send you off and bid you farewell, I charge you hold on to your principles and your people. Build your places. And remember that wherever you go, this place will always be one that belongs to you. Thank you. Take care.