

TWO LESSONS FROM JUDGE SILBERMAN

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Judge Silberman was for a year my boss and for decades thereafter my mentor and friend. Like so many of his former law clerks, I rarely made a significant decision in my professional or personal life without consulting him. He taught me many lessons, but two have been most important.

First, Judge Silberman was a model of intellectual honesty. He had strong opinions on many topics (many, many topics!), but he was always interested in having those opinions challenged and tested. He loved a vigorous debate, and when he saw weaknesses in his opinions, he was willing to change his mind. I think this is one reason that Judge Silberman had so many friends with strong (and often differing) opinions of their own. I have tried to follow this model in my life and my legal career, especially during my 13 years as a Justice on the Supreme Court of Georgia.

Second, and not unrelated, Judge Silberman was comfortable making hard decisions. He may never have told me this explicitly, but through his many stories about his experiences and the experiences of other public figures (good and bad) with whom he had worked, I learned that I should always make decisions in which I truly believed—decisions that I could explain to my mother without cringing and credibly defend when they were reported in the news media, as almost inevitably occurs with major decisions in public life. Learning to approach decision-making in this way was so important to my success, and my happiness, during my three decades of public service.

I have tried to pass on these lessons to the next generation of lawyers and public servants. There could be no better tribute to this great man, great judge, and great American than for others to emulate him in these respects.

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