

POINT OF VIEW

Adryan Richardson '20 Criminal Defense Clinic



THE SAYING THAT you must see it to believe it is certainly true. However, when it comes to assuming the role of a student attorney in the Criminal Defense Clinic you must experience it to believe it.

We all have a perception or idea of a practicing criminal attorney. Most of these ideas are brought to us through a TV screen or simply observing courtroom proceedings, but neither can truly prepare you for your first court appearance before one of the toughest judges in Baltimore City. In my case, preparation proved equally useless. I recall prepping for weeks for my client's first court appearance. I spent several hours anticipating and preparing for every possible situation including requesting a postponement, creating a good cause argument, and even writing cross examination chapters for trial. I thought I had everything figured out. I was confident. I was ready. I knew exactly what my client wanted, and I knew how

to best argue for his preferred outcome.

Fifteen minutes before court began, everything changed.

The prosecutor communicated a plan that my partner and I never expected. My strategy did a complete 180. My client's desires completely changed. I had to quickly draft a new argument that completely contradicted my initial argument. I basically had to argue against myself. The pressure was certainly on. In that moment, the amount of time I had to formulate a new argument or the amount of time I spent preparing no longer mattered. I had to quickly adjust. This moment taught me the importance and value of both communicating effectively with a client and forming a relationship with a client.

From the beginning of clinic, my clinic professor, Maneka Sinha, stressed the importance of client-centered advocacy. While I understood the words, the true

meaning and manifestation of them finally became clear. In the midst of my nervousness and uncertainty, the one thing that remained constant was the knowledge I possessed of my client. Maneka reminded me that I knew my client's desires, fears, and non-negotiables. This information and the support from my professor provided me with the comfort and peace of mind necessary to successfully prepare a new argument. I was confident. I was assured. I was ready. When my case was finally called, I went before the judge and told her all about my client. In the end, we received a favorable outcome.

My client was satisfied and my partner and I received a "job well done" from the judge. Looking back on this experience, it seems that the only thing that can truly prepare you for your first court appearance is your client. This experience taught me that the rapport and relationship you build with your client is valuable, steady, and never failing. ■