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ETHICAL MISCONDUCT IN FILM AND TELEVISION: AN ANALYSIS OF LEGAL ETHICS IN POPULAR MEDIA

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Legal professionals appear constantly on the silver screen, yet contemporary portrayals tend to romanticize unethical conduct rather than model competent, rule-bound practice. Drawing on an undergraduate Legal Ethics course in a legal studies program, this article analyzes Liar Liar, The Rainmaker, Erin Brockovich, and Suits to spotlight recurring violations of the New York Rules of Professional Conduct and the ABA Model Rules, including unauthorized practice of law, misrepresentation, conflicts of interest, breaches of confidentiality, and failures of supervision. Students first study doctrinal materials and then complete in-class issue-spotting exercises based on selected scenes, revealing how media depictions both shape their perceptions of lawyers and provide vivid fact patterns for teaching core ethical concepts. The article offers a practical framework for paralegal and legal studies educators seeking to integrate popular media into ethics instruction to counter Hollywood's "bad attorney" trope and strengthen students' appreciation of professional responsibility.

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I. INTRODUCTION

It should come as no surprise that lawyers are frequent topics on the silver screen. Hollywood screenwriters are paid to ensure the lawyers in movies entertain, not enlighten or set ethical standards. It is fair to say that Hollywood choices are not reliable guides for real lawyers. Ethical lawyers like the Atticus Finch¹ type will not bring in box office revenue like the hit television show *Suits*, which depicts lawyering as fun, glamorous, and rarely regulated by any rules of professional conduct. The fact is, if Hollywood were to produce a film about an attorney who respected the rules of confidentiality, conflicts of interest, and competency, and who did not violate any rules regulating solicitation, advertisement, or the unauthorized practice of law, it would result in an unfavorable “Tomatometer” score!

The negative portrayal of lawyers in contemporary cinema and television reflects how they are viewed by society.² The primary way people learn about lawyers is by watching fictionalized portrayals of them. Hollywood can influence the views of young lawyers and law students as to acceptable professional conduct.³ In recent years, students in all of my legal studies courses have disclosed that the shows they viewed lured them toward legal studies as a major and applying to law school. Although the AALS/Gallup *Before the JD* survey reports that public-spirited motivations and passion for the work rank ahead of prestige and high pay for many undergraduates considering law school, my anecdotal experience suggests that a significant subset of students still talk about law school primarily in terms of status, credentialing, and future earning potential rather than engagement with the law itself. The impact raises important questions about how the silver screen shaped the students’ views on what it means to be an attorney.⁴

The portrayal of lawyers in film has changed over time, a transition that has not gone unnoticed by scholars.⁵ Lawyers in Hollywood movies (“movie-lawyers”) made in the 1950s and 1960s were almost universally just and moral men,⁶ even when they were on the losing end of their courtroom battle.⁷ In movies made in the 1990s, the lawyer-hero was a much rarer character, and lawyers were much more often depicted as either incompetent or comic buffoons.⁸ In the past decade, popular television shows have depicted attorneys managing law firms as if they were nightclubs on the Las Vegas Strip.⁹

Hollywood productions can serve as powerful pedagogical tools, providing rich, accessible narratives that allow instructors to illustrate complex legal and ethical issues through the systematic review of selected films and television shows in the classroom.

II. METHODOLOGY

Movies and television shows included in this article were selected from a portion of those analyzed in Legal Ethics, an undergraduate level course at St. John's University.¹⁰ The screen content is viewed at the completion of topic lectures, after textbook reading and the analysis of the *New York Rules of Professional Conduct*¹¹ and the ABA's *Model Rules of Professional Conduct*.¹² The written exercise is completed in class without the use of devices where the students are graded on their ability to spot ethical issues. They are required to describe the facts of surrounding scenes, sometimes the exact specific language used that violates rules of professional responsibility and cite the specific rule. Once the assignment is completed, together the class analyzes their answers and discusses the topic. In addition, they are presented with fact patterns and real cases involving ethical violations of non-lawyers and lawyers. They soon learn that life imitates art and vice versa many times.

A. Lawyers are Regulated: Ethical Rules

The hit television show *Suits* depicted a group of attorneys who clearly slept through their ethics course in law school. The rules governing lawyer behavior are not new. The ethical behavior of lawyers began to be scrutinized as far back as the early 1900s.¹³ The *Rules of Professional Conduct* have been in place for a long time; however, television viewers are not interested in boring, ethical lawyers. The ABA established its first code of conduct, called the *Canons of Legal Ethics* (the "Canons"), in 1908.¹⁴ With only a few amendments, the Canons remained in place until 1969.¹⁵

1. Preamble

The Preamble of the New York Rules of Professional Conduct states succinctly "A Lawyer's Responsibilities":

A lawyer, as a member of the legal profession, is a representative of clients and an officer of the legal system with special responsibility for the quality of justice. As a representative of clients, a lawyer assumes many roles, including advisor, advocate, negotiator, and evaluator. As an officer of the legal system, each lawyer has a duty to uphold the legal process; to demonstrate respect for the legal system; to seek improvement of the law; and to promote access to the legal system and the administration of justice. In addition, a lawyer should further the public's understanding of and confidence in the rule of law and the justice system because, in a constitutional democracy, legal institutions depend on popular participation and support to maintain their authority.¹⁶

2. The Rules

The New York Rules of Professional Conduct, modeled on the ABA's Model Rules, serve as a cornerstone for legal ethics. The preamble emphasizes several key responsibilities of attorneys. First, attorneys are officers of the court with a special responsibility for the quality of justice. Second, they must demonstrate respect for the legal system and the administration of justice. Thirdly, lawyers shall further the public's understanding and confidence in the rule of law.

Essentially, these rules are designed to protect the public and ensure that legal practitioners uphold ethical standards. The legal profession is governed by numerous core ethical rules, which include confidentiality, avoidance of conflicts of interest, maintenance of communication with clients, respect for others, competence, honesty, integrity, and good moral character. These written rules are concrete, providing a framework for professional responsibility.

B. Effect of Popular Media on the Law

Media, specifically movies, play a significant role in shaping public perception of legal practices in several ways. For certain, it influences awareness and understanding. Besides being entertaining, the media has good moments. Movie or media coverage of a legal case, especially high-profile ones, can inform the public about legal processes, rights, and responsibilities. Media can serve as a platform for cultural commentary on legal issues, such as social justice, wrongful convictions, or access to legal representation. This can mobilize public opinion and influence policy changes. Movies, television shows, and documentaries can shed light on systemic issues within the legal system, such as racial bias or wrongful convictions, prompting public discourse and advocacy for reform.

However, sensationalized movies or reporting may lead to misconceptions about the law. Hollywood is forced to create a colorful portrayal of legal professionals. Films, television shows, and news media often depict lawyers and the legal system in a dramatic light. Characters like the suave attorney or the morally ambiguous paralegal can create stereotypes that shape how the public views legal professionals. Media portrayals can create unrealistic expectations about legal outcomes and unrealistic lifestyles. For example, courtroom dramas often simplify complex legal issues and present swift resolutions, leading audiences to believe that justice is always served quickly.

Movies often highlight ethical violations and misconduct among lawyers, which can lead to general distrust of the legal profession. When they see unethical behavior glamorized in shows, audiences become cynical about the integrity of real-life attorneys. Some even expect bad behavior or believe it is so common that they are desensitized to it. While they can educate and inform the public about legal practices, movies can also misrepresent and oversimplify complex issues, leading to skewed perceptions and expectations.

III. Movies and the Legal Profession

Movies and television frequently depict the legal profession through a lens of ethical ambiguity, highlighting violations of professional conduct. This review of a sample of legal movies analyzed in my ethics course¹⁷ explores ethical misconduct in films such as *Liar Liar*, *The Rainmaker*, and *Erin Brokovich*, and the hit television show *Suits*. By examining these portrayals, we can identify common violations of the Model Rules of Professional Conduct and their implications for public perception of the legal profession. As time passes on, the ethical misconduct becomes greater, leaving the audience with a reinforced perception that most lawyers are not to be trusted.

A. *Liar Liar*

ATTORNEY FLETCHER REEDE (*on phone*)

Hi! Judge Stevens, I'm scheduled to be in your courtroom in half an hour?

Judge Stevens, I badly, BADLY need a continuance!

(*pause*)

ATTORNEY FLETCHER REEDE

Ill? Am I ill? That is the perfect question for you to ask!

(*looks toward Secretary Greta*)

ATTORNEY FLETCHER REEDE

Greta, PLEASE LIE to him for me!

SECRETARY GRETA (*takes advantage of situation and Fletcher's inability to lie*)

I remember when you bought me this antique silver frame from Tiffany's.

ATTORNEY FLETCHER REEDE (*in a high-pitched voice*)

Garage sale, six-fifty marked down from ten.

(*Greta drops picture frame and it smashes*)¹⁸

Lying is not allowed in the legal profession, especially lying to the court.¹⁹ However, movies make this act common place. Jim Carrey plays Fletcher Reede, a fast-talking lawyer and divorced father who seems to make his living by telling lies. His young son, Max, played by Justin Cooper, makes a birthday wish that he would go an entire day without telling a lie. The legal profession looks awful in this one, both before and after Reede's truth-telling transformation. Reede habitually lies to clients and friends about his availability,²⁰ takes on a divorce case, referred by a firm partner because another lawyer in the firm refuses to lie or present false evidence, has sex with a firm partner to advance his career, tells his client what she wants to hear instead of giving her objective advice, disrupts courtroom proceedings, and is abusive to opposing counsel.²¹

This movie depicts divorce litigation through comedy and allows audiences to laugh as it reinforces preconceived notions that attorneys will do almost anything to win and advance in their careers, even at the expense of their family relationships or their client's family relationships. As ethical violations are easily spotted in this movie, the bad, comical attorney is far more entertaining than the attorney who is truthful, honest, and competent. An important take away, aside from the ethical violations, is the realistic restraints and sacrifices attorneys must make at the expense of family life.

B. *The Rainmaker*

- How can you tell when an attorney is lying? Answer: their lips are moving.²²
- How does an attorney sleep? First, he lies on one side, then he lies on the other.

- As the lawyer awoke from surgery, he asked, “Why are the blinds drawn?” The nurse answered, “There’s a fire across the street, and we didn’t want you to think you had died.”²³

No other movie packs in more ethical violations than this story of a struggling new attorney, Rudy Baylor, played by actor Matt Damon, who resorts to working for a shady lawyer, Bruiser Stone (Mickey Rourke), who recklessly practices as a would-be gangster. He works side by side with ambulance-chasing buffoon paralegal Deck Shifflet (Danny DeVito), who later becomes his “fake” partner.²⁴ Immediately from the start, numerous ethical violations take place. As a matter of fact, at least ten occur in the first fifteen minutes of the movie, followed by at least thirty more throughout the film. When Dot Black’s insurance company refuses her dying son coverage, Baylor and Shifflet team up to fight the corrupt corporation, taking on its callous corporate lawyer. Meanwhile, Baylor takes on a client and an intimate relationship with Kelly Riker, an abused wife, whose husband complicates matters resulting in Baylor murdering the husband.²⁵

While engaged in ambulance chasing, Baylor and Deck, the paralegal, visit a patient in a hospital bed who is barely conscious and in a full body cast to “sign up” the patient as a client.²⁶ Deck claimed that he was a lawyer and that his law firm “handles more car wrecks than anybody in Memphis. Insurance companies are terrified of us, and we don’t charge a dime,”²⁷ while placing a business card in the patient’s suspended hand which was in a cast.²⁸

BAYLOR

What if the guy had a lawyer?

DECK

We came with nothing. If he’d thrown us out, what have we lost?

BAYLOR

Dignity? A little self-respect?

DECK

In law school, they don’t teach you what you need to know. It’s all theories and lofty notions and big, fat ethics books!

DECK

What did they teach you in law school?

BAYLOR

Well, they didn’t teach me how to chase ambulances!

DECK

Well, you better learn quick, or you’re gonna starve!²⁹

This movie serves as one of the best teaching tools for any ethics class, but once again, it creates a poor image of personal injury lawyers. Numerous violations occur in this movie, particularly involving lawyers, judges, and clients. Clearly, the film details at least fifteen

instances of conflicts of interest and over 40 ethical violations where the characters ignore ethical rules, including practicing law without a license, improper solicitation of clients, fee-splitting with non-lawyers, and even wiretapping. The movie also highlights issues like withholding evidence and breaching client confidentiality. Once again, Hollywood loves rotten attorneys.

C. Erin Brockovich

Erin Brockovich is the quintessential Hollywood depiction of a David versus Goliath fight. In this film, attorney Ed Masry (played by Albert Finney) allows the feisty and eponymous non-attorney Erin Brockovich (played by Julia Roberts) to flash a toothy smile (among other things) and laugh her iconic laugh in the face of the rules of legal ethics as she pursues claims against the Goliath utility, Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), which allegedly caused catastrophic health conditions for residents of Hinkley, California, by leaking toxic chemicals into the ground water.

Brockovich's actions are imputed on Masry, whose reputation is on the line due to his lackadaisical approval of her investigating the actions of PG&E without reasonably and cautiously determining whether she is competent and adequately prepared to ethically execute the duties delegated to her.³⁰ After being given the nod, Brockovich engages in a variety of actions while on questionable ethical footing under the Rules. She communicates with a PG&E employee who provides her with internal information that could be construed as PG&E's admissions.³¹ Masry, as the supervising attorney, should have foreseen Brockovich's actions and warned her that she should refuse to speak to certain PG&E employees. By not informing Brockovich that her conduct might be proscribed conduct under the Rules, Masry condones and ratifies her conduct, subjecting himself to discipline.³²

Brockovich puts her sex appeal to use followed by misrepresentation and deceit when she tells a water department clerk that she is searching for documents for her boss who is in a "water dispute" and signs in using her maiden name to avoid future detection.³³ Erin violates the rule that prohibits making a false statement of material fact by not disclosing to the clerk that her boss is contemplating litigation. Since she was clearly aware that she was engaging in misconduct, she was savvy enough to use her maiden name and not her legal name for a sign-in sheet at the government office.³⁴ Brockovich improperly solicits clients for Masry as she personally goes to see Pamela Duncan. Attorneys cannot make direct contact with prospective clients, which would be uncomfortable under any circumstances, especially when a family is suffering from a loss or is injured and ill.³⁵

Although Brockovich's intentions can be viewed as noble in the face of many hurdles, including PG&E's false propaganda machine, Masry should be held responsible for her actions.³⁶ Even though audiences applaud the fact that Brockovich was a gifted counselor who could connect better with clients than attorney Masry, she unarguably violates ethical rules, criminal laws, and Section 6125 of the California Business and Professions Code by providing legal services and advice throughout the film.³⁷ An unintended consequence of her actions, however, is that Masry could be professionally disciplined by assisting her in the performance of that activity or ignoring the fact that she is engaging in the unauthorized practice of law.³⁸

Erin Brockovich was successful in representing the community, employing unconventional and ethically questionable methods, blurring the lines between activism and opportunism. Erin

Brockovich became a legal force and a “very competent” paralegal, which causes her cross ethical lines. Her unconventional methods were effective, but clearly, she had no legal training. The movie *Erin Brockovich* “highlights several ethical violations” and if those ethical violations were not embellished, the film would certainly have been flat at best.

Erin Brockovich is yet another example illustrating that breaching ethical standards is expected of legal professionals, especially on the silver screen.

D. *Suits*

The hit series *Suits* (currently streaming on Netflix) follows new associate Mike Ross in his adventures in big law working under partner Harvey Specter. In aggressively advocating for their clients, this duo uses tactics most attorneys would not normally see in a merger or a hearing before a judge. The show captivated audiences with its sharp dialogue, high stakes, legal drama, and charismatic attorneys. Beneath the entertainment lies the world of ethical dilemmas that raise serious questions about the practice of law.

There are many ethical lessons learned from *Suits* in just the first few episodes. Audiences continue to find this show wildly entertaining, and some believe that law firms actually operate in this fashion. From the very first episode, Mike Ross practices as a lawyer without having ever attended law school or taken the bar exam for himself.³⁹ We are introduced to Mike Ross as he’s running out of a law school admission test that he is taking for an unethical prospective law student who would like to achieve a high score for pay.⁴⁰ Despite his photographic memory, natural talent, his means of earning money, and subsequent employment as an associate at the law firm Pearson Hardman, it is a blatant violation of the rules of legal ethics.⁴¹

Fans of the show interestingly have indicated that they are not aware of the numerous ethical violations, nor can they identify them, or seemingly do not care because of the likeability or attractiveness of the characters. The characters themselves do not care about their ethical violations. Mike Ross, who could probably recite every rule of the New York Rules of Professional Responsibility, continuously violates ethical rules. He’s quite conscious of the fact that he’s holding himself out as a lawyer without a license.⁴² Harvey Specter, as a supervising attorney, knowingly allows this deception, making him complicit.⁴³ The managing attorney who is also the chief equity partner,⁴⁴ played by character Jessica Pearson, also becomes aware of the deception and fails to report it.⁴⁵ While Mike Ross’s abilities and charisma make for great television, in the real world, practicing law without a license carries severe consequences, which include criminal prosecution for the non-lawyer and disbarment for the supervising lawyer who condones the unauthorized practice.⁴⁶ Supervising lawyers must ensure that subordinates comply with ethical obligations.⁴⁷ In the first episode, Harvey Specter’s decision to hire Mike Ross, knowing that his credentials are fake,⁴⁸ is an ethical disaster.⁴⁹ By hiring and mentoring Mike, Harvey not only invited the bar⁵⁰ to take away his license, but he also exposed himself to felony prosecution and jail time. Additionally, Mike’s secret lies with multiple characters, including partner Louis Litt, who upon discovering the truth, chose to protect Harvey and Mike rather than report their misconduct.⁵¹ Throughout *Suits*, the ethical violations come fast and furious as lawyers deceive clients, opposing counsel, and even the court. Keep in mind that all the attorneys at Pearson Hardman are Harvard Law School graduates, with even Mike Ross obtaining a degree without having ever set foot on campus!

IV. Conclusion

The portrayal of legal professionals in popular media often highlights significant ethical violations that can shape public perception of the legal profession. Films such as *Liar Liar*, *The Rainmaker*, *Erin Brockovich*, and the television series *Suits* illustrate various breaches of the Model Rules of Professional Conduct, including unauthorized practice of law, misrepresentation, conflicts of interest, confidentiality breaches, and lack of competence.

These narratives, while entertaining, underscore the importance of ethical compliance within the legal profession and the potential consequences of failing to uphold these standards. The ethical dilemmas presented in these works serve as a reminder of the complexities and responsibilities inherent in legal practice.

Hollywood frequently romanticizes attorneys who break ethical rules. Shows like *Suits* and films such as *Erin Brockovich* present characters who thrive despite their unethical behavior. Many students express admiration for the stylish outfits of Harvey Specter or the audacity of Erin Brockovich, overlooking the serious implications of ethical violations.

Educators must emphasize the importance of the ethical practice of law, despite Hollywood's love affair with bad attorneys. By analyzing scenes from popular television shows and movies that depict ethical violations and discussing the consequences of such actions, students can better understand the real-world implications of ethical violations. This approach intertwines entertainment with legal ethics, fostering a deeper appreciation for the responsibilities of legal professionals and minimizing the glamour of misconduct.

As the portrayal of ethical attorneys in media diminishes, it is crucial to highlight the importance of ethics in the legal profession. By addressing the glamorization of unethical behavior in popular culture, we can instill a sense of responsibility and integrity in future legal practitioners.

¹ Actor Gregory Peck portrayed Atticus Finch in the screen adaptation of Harper Lee's novel *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD* (Pakula-Mulligan Prod. & Brentwood Prod. 1962).

² Michael Asimow, *Bad Lawyers in the Movies*, 24 NOVA L. REV. 533, 533-35 (2000) (noting the negative portrayals of lawyer characters in the majority of films involving the legal profession).

³ Arnold J. Johnson, *Ethics And Professionalism Through Hollywood Eyes: The Sequel*, 59 ANN. INST. ON MIN. L. 264, 265 & n.6 (2012) (citing Interview by Liane E. Leshne with Judge Marvin E. Aspen, *It's How You Play The Game*, 34 TRIAL 28 (July 1998) (observing that young lawyers and law students exposed to current Hollywood films sensationalizing trial practice may expect that they should act in some of the dramatic, abrasive ways portrayed)).

⁴ Association of American Law Schools & Gallup, *Before the JD: Undergraduate Views on Law School* 43-45 (2018) (reporting that undergraduates considering law school most often cited a pathway to a career in politics, government, or public service, passion for the work, and opportunities to help others or advocate for social change as primary motivations, with the prospect of a high-paying job and the prestige of being a lawyer ranked lower among fifteen factors).

⁵ See, e.g., PAUL BERGMAN & MICHAEL ASIMOW, *REEL JUSTICE: THE COURTROOM GOES TO THE MOVIES* (2d ed. 2006); Asimow, *supra* note 2, at 535; Carrie Menkel-Meadow, *Can They Do That? Legal Ethics in Popular Culture: Of Character and Acts*, 48 UCLA L. REV. 1305, 1306-07 (2001).

⁶ The gender-specific noun is appropriate here, as most if not all, lawyers in movies of the 1950s and 1960s were male.

⁷ *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*, *supra* note 1.

⁸ See, e.g., *LIAR LIAR* (Brian Grazer and Imagine Entertainment 1997); *MY COUSIN VINNY* (Twentieth Century Fox 1992).

⁹ SUITS (Netflix, aired June 23, 2011-Sep. 25, 2019).

¹⁰ Division of Legal Studies in the Collins College of Professional Studies, St. John's University 8000 Utopia Parkway, St. Augustine Hall, Queens, New York.

¹¹ N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 22, § 1200 (2025).

¹² See MODEL RULES OF PRO. CONDUCT (A.B.A. 1983). The New York Rules of Professional Conduct became effective in 2009. The current Rules are modeled after the American Bar Association's Model Rules of Professional Conduct. Prior to 2009, New York's Code of Professional Responsibility was still modeled after the ABA Code of Professional Responsibility, which the ABA replaced in 1983. The New York Rules of Professional Conduct have been adopted by the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court and are published as Part 1200 of the Joint Rules of the Appellate Division.

¹³ Tonja Haddad, *Silver Tongues on the Silver Screen: Legal Ethics in the Movies*, 24 NOVA L. REV. 673 (2000). "In 1927, the Chicago Bar Association, concerned with the public's view of the legal profession, 'formed a Committee on Publicity and Public Relations . . . to create a "a more favorable attitude on the part of the public toward the bar."'" *Id.* at 673 n.2 (quoting LAWYERS: A CRITICAL READER 193 (Richard L. Abel ed., 1997)) (citing Leslie E. Gerber, *Can Lawyers be Saved? The Theological Legal Ethics of Thomas Shaffer*, 10 J.L. & RELIGION 347 (1994)).

¹⁴ *About the Model Rules*, A.B.A. (last visited Sep. 1, 2025),

https://www.americanbar.org/groups/professional_responsibility/publications/model_rules_of_professional_conduct/.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ The New York Rules of Professional Conduct (NYRPC), which became effective on April 1, 2009, have been adopted by the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court and are published as Part 1200 of the Joint Rules of the Appellate Division, N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 22, § 1200. The Appellate Division has not adopted the Preamble, Scope and Comments, which are published solely by the New York State Bar Association to provide guidance for attorneys in complying with the Rules. NYSBA, NYSBA NY Rules of Professional Conduct (2025), <https://nysba.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/NYSBA-NY-Rules-of-Professional-Conduct-June-1-2026.pdf>.

¹⁷ Division of Legal Studies in the Collins College of Professional Studies, St. John's University 8000 Utopia Parkway, St. Augustine Hall, Queens, New York.

¹⁸ LIAR LIAR, *supra* note 7. Attorney Reede answers the phone with his secretary Greta near him.

¹⁹ N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 22, § 1200.3.3 (Conduct Before a Tribunal); *id.* § 1200.4.1 (Truthfulness in Statements to Others).

²⁰ LIAR LIAR, *supra* note 7.

²¹ N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 22, § 1200.8.4(c) (Misconduct, *id.* § 1200.1.7 (Conflicts of Interest); *id.* § 1200.3.2 (Delay of Litigation); *id.* § 1200.3.3 (Conduct Before a Tribunal); *id.* § 1200.4.1 (Truthfulness in Statements to Others).

²² THE RAINMAKER (Paramount Pictures 1997).

²³ Tony McFarland, "Holiday Humor," Bass Berry & Sims PLC, <https://www.bassberry.com/holiday-humor/> (accessed June 25, 2026).

²⁴ N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 22, § 1200.5.4 (Professional Independence of a Lawyer). Character Deck Shifflet never passed the bar examination. Baylor is violating Rule 5.4 by starting a law firm and forming a partnership with him.

²⁵ *Id.* § 1200.1.8 (Current Clients: Specific Conflict of Interest Rules).

²⁶ *Id.* § 1200.4.5 (Communication After Incidents Involving a Personal Injury or Wrongful Death).

²⁷ See *id.* § 1200.3.1 (Non-Meritorious Claims and Contentions).

²⁸ See *id.* § 1200.7.3 (Solicitation and Recommendation of Professional Employment).

²⁹ RAINMAKER, *supra* note 21.

³⁰ N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 22, § 1200.5.3 (Lawyers Responsibility for Conduct of Nonlawyers).

³¹ *Id.* § 1200.4.2 (Communication with Person Represented by Counsel).

³² *Id.* § 1200.5.3 (Lawyer's Responsibility for Conduct of Nonlawyers).

³³ *Id.* § 1200.4.1(a) (Truthfulness in Statements to Others).

³⁴ *Id.* § 1200.8.4(c) (Misconduct). This rule prohibits a lawyer or law firm from engaging in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation.

³⁵ *Id.* § 1200.7.3 (Solicitation and Recommendation of Professional Responsibility).

³⁶ *Id.* § 1200.5.3 (Lawyer's Responsibility for Conduct of Nonlawyers).

³⁷ *Id.* § 1200.5.5 (Unauthorized Practice of Law).

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ The New York State Board of Law Examiners sets the standards and eligibility for an individual to sit for the New York State bar examination. Section 520 of the Rules of the Court of Appeals for the admission of attorneys and counselors at law provides four routes for an applicant to qualify to take the New York State bar examination, all of which require at least some form of classroom study in a law school. The most common route for one to sit for the New York State bar examination is to graduate from an ABA-approved law school study program that awards a Juris Doctorate degree. The law requires that before admitting these applicants in person to the bar of the State of New York, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court must be satisfied that each applicant “possesses the character and general fitness requisite for an attorney and counselor-at-law,” N.Y. JUD. LAW § 90[1] (MCKINNEY 2025), and it directs the creation of the committees for the purpose of investigating the character fitness of every applicant for admission to practice. N.Y. C.P.L.R. R 9401 (MCKINNEY 2025). Unless otherwise ordered by the Appellate Division, no person may be admitted to practice without having received the certificate from the proper committee testifying that it has carefully investigated the character and fitness of the applicant and that the applicant is of good character and is fit to practice. N.Y. C.P.L.R. R 9404 (MCKINNEY 2025).

⁴⁰ N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 22, § 1200.8.1 (Candor in the Bar Admission Process).

⁴¹ *Id.* § 1200.5.5 (Unauthorized Practice of Law).

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ An equity partner at a law firm is a part owner who has made a capital investment in the firm and shares in his profits and losses. They have a financial stake in the firm and its success, participate in major business and strategic decisions (often having voting rights), and are held personally responsible for the firm’s liabilities. This role involves a significant level of commitment, responsibility, and a “buy-in” of capital from the individual partner.

⁴⁵ N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 22, § 1200.8.3 (Reporting Professional Misconduct).

⁴⁶ The unauthorized practice of law can result in delayed or denied admission for bar candidates, and disbarment, suspension, sanctions, or prosecution for attorneys. Typically, it is a misdemeanor offense in most jurisdictions, but in certain circumstances, it can rise to a felony. *See, e.g.*, TEX. PENAL CODE ANN. § 38.123 (West 2023); N.J. STAT. ANN. § 2C:21-22 (West 2023); FLA. STAT. § 454.23.

⁴⁷ N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 22, § 1200.5.3 (Lawyer’s Responsibility for Conduct of Nonlawyers).

⁴⁸ *See supra* note 37.

⁴⁹ N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 22, § 1200.5.1 (Responsibilities of Law Firms, Partners, Managers, and Supervisory Lawyers).

⁵⁰ To become a Member of the bar means to be licensed by a state of jurisdiction to practice law, a privilege granted by the court system after the individual has met all its requirements. Bar admission is specific to a particular state or jurisdiction. An attorney admitted in one state is not automatically permitted to practice in another. The term “bar” also refers to the collective body of licensed lawyers. This comes from the historical practice of legal professionals being summoned to the physical “bar” in a courtroom to advocate for clients. The common consensus is that the term was a reference to the furniture they’ve divided a courtroom in medieval Europe. That layout continues to exist in today’s prosperous courtroom. However, instead of furniture, a rail (or quote bar”) separates the public viewing section of a courtroom from the section reserved for anyone participating in the court proceeding.

⁵¹ N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 22, § 1200.8.3(a) (Reporting Professional Misconduct) (“A lawyer, who knows that another lawyer has committed a violation of the Rules of Professional Conduct that raises a substantial question as to that lawyer’s honesty, trustworthiness or fitness as a lawyer shall report such knowledge to a tribunal or other authority empowered to investigate or act upon such violation.”).

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