



ATTORNEY SPOTLIGHT SERIES:

The Power of Empathy with Attorney Kathryn Burmeister

“I was one of those weird kids who always wanted to be a lawyer,” Attorney Kathryn Burmeister says. And in high school, as she pored through literature like *To Kill A Mockingbird* and *Letter From a Birmingham Jail*, she began to understand why.

“I liked the idea of being a voice for the voiceless and standing up for something to make a change,” Burmeister explains.

So it’s probably no surprise that, once in law school, she gravitated toward the personal injury practice area. “I fell in love with it,” she says. “You can help a lot of people in the legal profession but, in particular, with personal injury, it’s more rewarding.”

And since her passion for law began early, it’s probably even less surprising that she now runs her own practice, **Burmeister Law Firm**, offering a broad range of legal services involving personal injury matters.

...Well, OK. It may be a little surprising to Burmeister.

“I never wanted my own law firm,” she admits with a laugh. “But it’s the best thing I’ve ever done, and I don’t think I could go back to working for somebody else.”

CONNECTING WITH CLIENTS

Any doctor will tell you the value of a good “bedside” manner, and that’s just as true in the legal profession—perhaps more so in the personal injury practice area than anywhere else. Burmeister is quick to point out that it’s a central part of her practice philosophy too.

She credits an empathetic, sympathetic nature as an effective way to make her clients feel more comfortable around her. You won’t find giant mahogany walls or dusty leather-bound books in her office. In fact, when Burmeister meets with a client, she may dress a bit more casually and visit them at their home—all efforts to eliminate a perceived divide and make clients feel more relaxed.

And that's important. Burmeister describes the sometime-difficult process of getting her clients to open up about the real scope of their injuries. Any methods that encourage clients to be open and forthcoming with their case details can have measurable benefits.

"I want to tap into that pain and suffering element and try to quantify it as best we can," she explains.

ENHANCING THE HEALING PROCESS

Burmeister is clear that her ultimate goal isn't necessarily a cash award. "Yes, the money helps," she says, "but it's not the end-all, be-all." Sometimes, Burmeister describes, the best outcome is care. "I want to get them to a place where they can be as close to healed as possible," she says.

That's because, in her experience, injuries often go far deeper than physical scars. A big proponent of mental health, Burmeister stresses the importance of the psychological aspect of healing. For example, a client not being able to play their favorite sport or interact with their children can have a lasting, profound impact on their overall health. "It's draining," Burmeister says. "I think it wears on people more than they realize."

That's why she's so focused on being able to relate to her clients. "I want to really be able to make someone feel comfortable to talk about their injuries, and how they've been impacted in all facets of their lives."

EMPATHY IN PRACTICE

Being empathetic to a client's situation isn't a simple process, however. You've got to be able to listen and respond accordingly. "Everybody's needs are different," Burmeister explains. "Yes, I work with car injuries, yes, I handle slip-and-falls, but all of my cases are different," she says. "Because they're all different people."

But it's the personal aspect and ability to really help individual clients that truly represents why Burmeister began practicing law in the first place.

"There's a real sense of virtue in what we're doing," she beams. "I take pride in that."

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