

Rodd Santomauro: A Life Shaped By Barry's Mission, Experiences

All his life Rodd Santomauro (2004) has worked tirelessly and tenaciously to achieve his dreams – to be the first in his family to graduate from college, to pass the bar and become a successful lawyer, and to pursue a career focused on a call to service and promoting social justice issues. However, one of the most pivotal moments in his life's journey occurred when he stopped at an unexpected crossroad, holding the J.D. he'd just earned from Barry Law School. The choice he made next would shape the rest of his life.

Becoming a lawyer had been Santomauro's dream since he was a child growing up in south Florida. By high school, it became a driving passion. So much so that he chose to compete in a national moot court competition rather than take his girlfriend to the prom. "By the time I got back, we were no longer together," Santomauro says with a laugh. "She went to prom with someone else."



Undaunted, Santomauro then began his college career in the Honors Pre-Law program at Barry University in North Miami Shores. "I immediately felt called to Barry's mission, sense of community, and religious vantage points," he remembers. One of his first semester's Honors seminars, "Building The City Of God," particularly resonated with Santomauro. "I still remember that class as a microcosm of Barry's mentality and spirit," he says, "giving students an understanding of the world and how it has evolved to today, along with the realization that each of us has a moral compass and we're charged with serving others to make a difference."

Everything about Santomauro's initial Barry experience made a deep impression upon him. "Those first months at Barry really helped me organize and compartmentalize everything I believed," he says, "giving me a clearer, deeper understanding of one's core commitments – and how they can align with Barry's own Core Commitments" as articulated in the university's mission statement.



Those Barry experiences stayed with Santomauro, even when he moved with his family to Orlando the next year and transferred to UCF to earn his B.A. in Legal Studies. After graduating from UCF, Santomauro began clerking in a plaintiff personal injury law firm before his eyes again turned to Barry University. This time his attention focused on the newly-established Law School in Orlando where he could pursue his lifelong dream of becoming an attorney.

"I knew if I went to Barry I would be able to continue clerking in downtown Orlando during the day, still live at home with my family, and go to law school at night," he says.

At Barry's Law School, Santomauro's connection with the university's mission continued to build and deepen. By the time he graduated, that mission had become a solid foundation for shaping his future. "Barry's call to service and promotion of social justice issues have served as the underpinnings for the way I have worked and practiced law since then," he says.

Several years later, Santomauro reached a crossroad, this time after relocating to Washington DC. "Although I enjoyed practicing law, I decided there were many additional things I could do with a law degree ... still staying in the legal space but choosing a path with more advocacy," he says. So he decided to seek a new leadership role in consumer and legal advocacy. In 2010 he became CEO /

Executive Director of HALT, a 20,000-member national legal non-profit where he led advocacy, personnel, finances, operations, fundraising, and marketing.

In 2011, Santomauro achieved a distinctive honor. Along with twelve alumni from Barry Law School, he was part of the first group of Barry graduates to be sworn in to the U.S. Supreme Court during a memorable induction ceremony conducted by Chief Justice John Roberts.

“All those years of work culminated in a day I will always treasure,” says Santomauro. “I was honored and humbled to be one of the first Barry Law graduates sworn in to practice law before the highest court in the land. It truly was the personification of Barry’s mission, which has resonated so strongly with me throughout my career.”

A few years later he moved to Synergy Settlement Services, a public interest group based in the nation’s capital – first as COO and currently as Chief Business Development Officer. “We’re the only organization of its kind in the U.S.,” says Santomauro. “We focus 100% on plaintiffs – only injured victims.”

Today, in addition to his demanding career, Santomauro still gives of his personal time to volunteer for endeavors that reflect his passion for advocacy. He is a member of the Membership Oversight Committee for the American Association for Justice, a volunteer lawyer for the DC Volunteer Lawyers Project, and a member of the Development Committee for Public Justice. “Serving and mentoring others and paying it forward is an absolute obligation we have,” he says. “It’s so important to help people and guide them when they’re not in a position to do so themselves.”



And those perspectives of mission-based service are threaded through the advice Santomauro has for graduates of the Dwayne O. Andreas School of Law. “First, never stop learning,” he says. “And always remember how hard you worked to get to this point. Never take your license for granted, and be sure to always provide passionate and zealous representation to all.”

And he has one final encouragement. “Read your lawyer’s oath every day,” he urges. “It’s hanging on my wall, and I read it every day to remind me that we’re charged in society with doing good and required in our profession to employ such means only as are consistent with truth and honor.”

Powerful advice from someone who worked twice to achieve his own lawyer’s oath, and has leveraged the Barry experience and mission to promote social justice issues while answering a lifelong call to service.