

**OPEN NINTH:
CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM
MEET ERIC REED
EPISODE 127
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HOSTED BY: DONALD A. MYERS, JR.**

(Music)

NARRATOR: Welcome to another episode of “Open Ninth: Conversations Beyond the Courtroom” in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida.

And now here’s your host, Chief Judge Don Myers.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Hello, and welcome to Open Ninth. Joining me today is Eric Reed, a partner at the law firm of Shutts & Bowen, who’s been named as one of the best lawyers for bankruptcy and creditor rights in the 2021 Edition of *Best Lawyers in America*. He’s also the president-elect of the Orange County Bar Association and he’s just about four short weeks away from stepping into that role and taking on all of that responsibility.

I want to thank you for joining me, Eric. It’s really great to have you with us.

ERIC REED: Absolutely. Happy to be here, Judge Myers.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: So, Eric, we’d like to just learn a little bit about you. Share with our listeners some of your background in the law, but also maybe a little bit of personal background that you might be willing to share. I think it’s a good thing for the community to know its leaders, and you’re taking on a very significant leadership role.

So tell us a little bit about yourself. Where are you from? High school? College?

ERIC REED: Sure. Absolutely. First off, excited to take over as the president of the Orange County Bar Association. And big shoes to fill with LaShawnda Jackson over this past year. So excited about that, looking forward to it.

I grew up in Palm Beach County, a town called Boynton Beach. And my family -- my mother’s side, grandfather and grandmother, were there -- my goodness -- he was the first -- one of the first practicing attorneys in Boynton Beach. And then my father ended up working for him and took over the practice. And then now we have a third generation of my sister -- much

younger sister -- she know is in charge of the firm in Boynton Beach, and they focus on probate wills and trusts. Do not touch litigation.

So grew up in Boynton Beach. Played baseball. Thought my vision was to go and play baseball at Stanford and then certainly play professional baseball, and soon realized that that's a pretty competitive world. Had some opportunities to play for some very small schools. And then as my dad, my mother, my grandfather, all as Gators -- he said, why don't you think about your future and go to the University of Florida. And I did. I did not play baseball there, but I certainly enjoyed all the fun at University of Florida.

I was a Broadcast News major, and I really enjoyed it. I thought my path was to become a reporter, maybe an anchor down the road. And I learned, as I was graduating, that my friends were heading out to some small town maybe in the Midwest or in the North and they were going to make \$18,000 a year. And I said, well, my goodness, I can't afford that.

So I passed on that and I took a sales management job for the State of Florida in consumer products and I was making \$22,000 a year, so I thought that was a really smart move. So I always wished that I would have given it a stab, and even a couple friends that are in the business said, you know, you chickened out, you should have done it. So --

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Begs the question, you know, what consumer products were you selling?

ERIC REED: Yeah. Absolutely. So I know we're very electronic, in the electronic age, but these were AT-A-GLANCE calendars, wall planners, organizers, you know, the big boards you put up and you write your schedule on. I still use my desk pad calendar. And that morphed into Mead paper products.

So during that stint -- I think I was there about five years. But during that point, my dad, he said, hey, why don't you think about law school, maybe come back home and take over the practice. And so I did. I went to Barry University law school and I was able to balance both the night program and still keep the job. And so that really helped out certainly with the student loan debt. Didn't have to deal with that, and came out pretty unscathed with student loans.

And then began -- after I graduated, I decided, well, probably time to give up the sales job and actually try to practice law or learn how to practice law. And I started at the State Attorney's Office here in the Ninth Judicial Circuit. Was very fortunate, some good friends, Will Jay and Judge Wayne Wooten, put a good word in for me with Bill Vose and I was hired on. And I didn't quite make the three-year commitment, but did about a year and a half and then went on to a small civil litigation firm, Stovash, Case & Tingley, was there a couple years, and then I've now been at Shutts & Bowen for maybe sixteen-plus years or so.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: I'm really fascinated that in a family with that legacy of law you were able to hold out for any length of time in a consumer products sales job or doing anything other than heading straight to law school. How did that come about?

ERIC REED: Yeah, it's a great question. You know, my dad never put pressure on me that you will go to UF, although he suggested, hey, why don't you think about it. And never said, hey, you need to go to law school. It was, hey, if -- you know, think about law school. And at the time, like I mentioned, my sister is much younger -- is -- we didn't -- I think she might have been in grade school at the time. But why don't you think about it. And, you know, it sounds good.

And as I was graduating in 2000-and -- oh, gosh, was it 2000-and -- I graduated in 2001, and then it was, hey get some experience up there in Orlando. And then we roll into 2007, 2008

where everything was kind of crashing and the thought was just stay up there. And next thing I know, I'm here for 12, 15 years and the roots are too deep to leave now with children and a wife. So --

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: So I'm imagining coming back to law school after an extended time away from college and the challenges that you must have felt as a non-traditional student moving back into a very competitive academic environment.

ERIC REED: Yeah, definitely. And you're right, even a couple years out, you forget how to study. The good thing is with the non-traditional evening program that Barry had, they were folks like me, and certainly older than me, and so we had that niche of most of these folks were, you know, working somewhere. And so that did help. And we had, you know, kind of a bond there that, you know, we're not your normal -- what is it, the traditional age -- 21 or 22-year-old that's in law school and can focus on that. That we've got -- a lot of the folks had children, you know, some of my colleagues in law school. So, you know, it was fun. I certainly enjoyed the ride at Barry.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Good for you. So you've been practicing now for how many years?

ERIC REED: Well, I guess it was probably 2002, so 19 years.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Nineteen years.

ERIC REED: Nineteen years.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: All right. And as a 19-year lawyer having had experience in a couple different law firm settings at this point, any cases that you look back at and say, boy, that was unique, or that was a defining case for me or for my practice? Anything like that that stands out?

ERIC REED: Yeah. I would say one, and it still is going on. I think we tried the case in front of Judge Munyon in 2009 or '10, a pro se party, husband, wife, and it has gone every court from the State of Florida even federal -- a federal case was filed as well by the pro se party, and it has been -- I've learned a lot from it. And really it was, you know, the practice of law, in this case -- particular case, it certainly is a marathon. And you really can't get wound up too much. You know, we've got to do the best job we can for our client and stay within what the rules allow and the ethics allow.

But I tell you, it was -- I learned a lot. I learned -- I think that was my first -- I don't do appellate law, but I did argue in front of the Fifth DCA. Enjoyed that. Very nerve-wracking, but it certainly was something that's -- it's still lingering around. But it was -- and even the respect I had for the pro se parties, you know, although they were -- they had their vision of the case and certainly we did, and -- but, you know, still respect as well. At the end of the day, you know, I'm going home to my family and, you know, want to continue my legal -- you know, certainly my legal practice and, you know, ethics, you know, really on top of everything.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: You know, I've had the privilege of knowing you for many years as a lawyer appearing before us in the courts here. And I can certainly testify to your level of professionalism, that you have a sincere desire to be a professional in whatever circumstance you're in. And I know that's a lot of the reason why you've been elected by your colleagues to serve as president of the Bar.

But that experience in a pro se case I think is an insight into just how deep in your character that professionalism flows. And I would complement you on that. I think that's a right approach to a case, to parties, and to tough circumstances. I mean, cases with unrepresented litigants can be very difficult to prosecute, so --

ERIC REED: Yeah. And I appreciate that. And it's not easy, that's for sure. But you're right, just kind of keep your eye on the ball and -- but I thank you.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Best moment as a lawyer?

ERIC REED: Goodness. You know, I'm certainly proud of, like you mentioned, my peers electing me as -- and the members of the Orange County Bar as the president-elect and now taking over as the president of the Orange County Bar Association. You know, started as a young lawyer not knowing anyone in town, and then just, you know, serving on a committee. Loved to golf, served on the golf committee and kind of worked my way through the ranks of the Young Lawyers and became the president of that group. And then folded into the Executive Council. And, you know, really have enjoyed, you know, the comradery, you know, certainly the networking part of it, and just getting to know other folks and other practices and really our members of the Orange County Bar.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Put you on the spot. Do you know how many members of the Bar we have now, approximately?

ERIC REED: Yeah. We're just over 3,000 members, and we are looking every day for more members. You know, there's been many an article about how the local bar association -- that the membership is dropping. We've been very fortunate at the Orange County Bar that our members -- there's something there for them, I'm hoping, from the multitude of committees we have to the engagements that we give. And soon, cross our fingers, we'll have our -- you know, what we -- many people enjoy is our monthly luncheons. I'm hoping those will be back July maybe August that we can get together.

But we're about 3,000 members. And in Central Florida there's probably seven to eight thousand practicing attorneys, so there's certainly a market out there that we're hoping to

capture. And the good support that our members -- either through their pro bono work or the funds they pay towards the Legal Aid Society to really help those folks in Orange County that just can't afford an attorney. So that really is a great service we provide as a member.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: If I'm a lawyer in this community and I'm not a member of the Orange County Bar, why would you -- what would you tell me to convince me that I should be a member?

ERIC REED: Oh, please, just do me a favor. Do me a solid. No. You know, what's your practice, you know, how we can help you. I mean, even at Shutts & Bowen, we're fortunate because the firm supports it and everyone's a member, but we have real estate transactional attorneys. You know, what could they really benefit from the Orange County Bar Association? And really, it's the committees that we have that would serve them, and really the opportunity to get to know other attorneys that if -- they might need help, they might need a divorce attorney, they might need a criminal defense attorney. And it can't hurt to know more people than you already know, just for that alone.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: And from my personal experience too, the educational opportunities that the Orange County Bar offers are just phenomenal. I know we've already started and got on the books the next Bench Bar Conference, a major -- the major educational event sponsored by the Orange County Bar in which lawyers and judges come together and talk about significant, meaty topics that are of tremendous value to the practice.

I did something recently. Member Perks. Tell me about that. It was a morning-time coffee.

ERIC REED: Yeah. A really -- Karen Fast, who was with the Bar staff for many years -- and she's moved on to become the executive director up in -- I forgot which state it is. So

anyway, we were chatting one day and she said -- it really was her brainchild, and she asked me to host it. And it was an opportunity for a members-only event to bring back -- we'll call it a seasoned attorney. Someone that's been in this community for 30, 40 years, and really to give us a vision of what it was like, maybe some war stories, where they've seen the practice of law -- and boy, we've had just a plethora of great speakers just come and educate and -- back in normal times, right, we would get together on a Wednesday morning, and we'd spend about an-hour-and-a-half together, have a little coffee, some snacks, get to know each other, hear a great speaker for 20 or 30 minutes. We're now doing it online on Zoom, but we'll be back at it. But really a great opportunity for some new members to come and listen to that.

And what really opened my eyes was Ava Doppelt, John Fisher, folks that really have been -- they come to every single one of those and enjoy seeing their peers, catching up with them as well.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Well, I haven't been in the practice 30 or 40 years. I try to be a faithful attender, but don't put me in that age category just yet. I appreciate that.

So you're in the transition process to serve as the president. You've been the president-elect, and I assume been kind of shadowing those things that LaShawnda has been doing. What are your priorities? What are the things that capture your vision for the OCBA?

ERIC REED: Yeah. And if you would have said that maybe back in January of 2020, it might have been different. And so now as we've gotten through this, we see the light at the end of the tunnel, it's really what can we do safely to "open the doors". What can we do -- you know, each year we would have four fun social events that would raise money for the Orange County Bar Foundation Legal Aid Society. What can we do to have our poker event again, to have our holiday parties, to get back together to give those members that enjoy that networking

piece. So that really is my focus is what can we do safely to get back together. And then -- and also hopefully, like you mentioned, the Bench Bar Conference. We had a fantastic online version, but we're going to hopefully bring it back in the spring and -- in person. So we're looking forward to that as well.

And then what's always been, you know, near and dear to my heart is the -- you know, what mentoring can we give our younger attorneys. Kristopher Kest has done such a great job both early on as a mentoring program through law school to Young Lawyer, and then he developed that into now a mentoring program with our -- I think it's maybe a ten-year-plus attorney and a ten-year-and-under attorney and getting them together. And it really is -- kind of help promote that as, you know, folks graduate law school and they don't go into a firm for whatever reason, is to maybe help the solo practitioner just -- you know, I have a question -- a legal question maybe we can help them with, or just, you know, what do I do here. And certainly so they don't burn out or they don't go down the wrong path.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: You know, this has been a difficult time during the pandemic, and I know lawyers, judges, and everybody connected with the legal profession has experienced challenges of some sort. Setting aside the pandemic for just a moment, though, if you can, what do you think are the biggest challenging -- challenges facing lawyers these days?

ERIC REED: Yeah. I mean, I think -- and maybe it's not new, but it's just the stress of a practice, if either you -- you're in a firm of any size, really, it's, you know, either billing the hours, settling the case, whatever it is for the monetary profit of the firm and forgetting about, well, you know, this is the -- this -- the journey versus, you know, the destination, and am I being a good parent, am I being a good husband, a wife, whatever the case might be, and don't get

consumed in -- you know, I'm not saying let's not do a good job. Let's not be consumed that the only thing that we have is the practice of law.

And I have seen that where you look around and it seems like the attorney's hobby is practicing law; their job and their hobby. And it -- look, that's great if they enjoy it, but it seems like they're missing something out there and -- you know, either fun things that they would want to do, or spend it with their family or, you know, whatever the case might be.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Sure. As we're coming out of the pandemic, I can't help but look back over this time and reflect on the efforts of some people to bring joy, to try to remain optimistic, and to share that with people around them. And you had an adventure like that during the pandemic on Facebook. It was the SGN, the Some Good News. Tell us about that. What was the -- how did that start, who connected -- who were you connected with through that?

ERIC REED: Yeah. I would take all the credit, but I just can't do it. So Tony Sos calls me up, our past president, and Tony always has a great vision, and he mentions it to me and he's like, John Krasinski. I said, Tony, who's John Krasinski. And I'm an *Office* watcher, and I don't even put it together. And he says, you need to go on, you need to watch his YouTubes on Some Good News. So I said, okay. I watched. I said, Tony, what do you want to do. He goes, well, I want to do something on the OCBA front.

So really it was his vision. And we, you know, put it together. And the first one was a little awkward, but it really was -- you know, look, we need to put some -- give some light and a spin of the kind of the lawyery [sic] sort of Orange County Bar world. And so we did, I think, maybe three or four of them, and we got better. And the setup -- like today, here, we've got these great mikes, an audio mixer probably over there. And mine was a computer screen with my iPhone attached to it and reading off it; my wife maybe pushing the -- you know, pushing the

on and off button. And my costar Baxter was with me. He wasn't too excited about being in it, but it really was neat.

You know, we had -- at one point, in one of our editions, we had -- the Orlando Magic got involved with us. And that was really neat. One of the stories that we plagiarized from another news outlet, and it was gentleman that was a utilities worker, and he saw a lady at a retirement home, she was sitting outside, and he sang happy birthday to her. And so we reached out to him, he did an interview with us, the Magic loved it, the Magic said, hey -- Bo Outlaw did a little thing to him thanking him, sent him a basketball. And it really was a neat -- you know, kind of a neat kind of process just to give people, you know, something to laugh at, hopefully, and, you know, maybe smile a little bit.

And there's folks that aren't even in the law world that say, when is the next SGN, you know, friends, family, and I guess we should maybe bring another one out here soon.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: A hundred percent, you should. Hundreds and hundreds of views, and it was fun. And it gave folks an opportunity to laugh. I appreciate your willingness to let people laugh with you at that.

ERIC REED: Yeah. Well -- and I had a great weatherman in the last one or two with Judge Eric DuBois, and so he was a good sport about it.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: That's excellent. That's great. So for the person that doesn't know Eric Reed, tell us some little-known fact about yourself. Something that the average person may not know.

ERIC REED: Well, certainly in this last year -- probably a good chunk of folks know I love to play golf. I've played the most rounds of golf, like probably a lot folks, because there was a lot of down time. So I've enjoyed doing that.

But enjoy -- I guess we'll call it woodworking, making furniture. And really it starts as my wife saying, Pottery Barn has this, it's \$2,000, can you make this. And that started many years ago, and so now I've -- I enjoy doing it and now I've got most of the tools to make it happen with what we're -- our vision is. So that's kind of a -- sort of a stress reliever for me as well, to get out there and try to think through this is something we've got to build. Kind of like a case in law. Like I get a case, what are we going to do, what are the next steps. And then obviously you hit a snag, i.e., I'm not a master carpenter, and how do I get around this because I don't have the -- whatever it is, the particular tool or the knowledge and fix it. So I do enjoy doing that.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: That's great. You obviously, over 19 years, have accomplished a tremendous amount. You're partner in a very fine law firm here in town. You're going to become the president of the Orange County Bar Association, probably -- I mean, I would say the best bar in the country. There are many who would agree with me.

What's left? What are your aspirations after this?

ERIC REED: Oh, boy, that's a good question. I'll probably just retire. You know, retire after this year. No.

So another passion I have that will keep me busy, kind of an overlap and then I'll have another year, is I'm involved with the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Central Florida. So I will -- in January, I take over as the chair of that organization. So happy to, you know, give back, however we can do that. So that will kind of take -- roll into another year.

But great question is, you know, down the road, I don't know if I see myself maybe mediating as well. And, you know, things -- sometimes things change and then you have to pivot. So -- but certainly looking forward to this upcoming year.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: And just for the benefit of the young lawyers that might listen to this, who were your mentors? Who's inspired you along this path?

ERIC REED: Yeah, absolutely. The -- I would say in the judicial world, Judge John Jordan and Judge LeBlanc. There's many of them.

But I tell you, Judge Mike Murphy was not a judge at the time. I was a new State Attorney, I just got my rear end handed to me at a DUI hearing -- I don't know if it was an intox -- maybe it was just how they -- the stop -- you know, I'm forgetting all the criminal stuff -- but how they stopped the defendant. And he was sitting in the gallery, he was up next, and I finished and he said, you know, Eric, you want some advice. I said, absolutely, I need some advice. And he took five minutes, ten minutes just to kind of go through it with me. And I really thought that was -- it was very touching that -- he didn't need to. He was a private criminal defense attorney. But he saw that, you know, this young attorney needed some guidance. And so I really respect that.

Within the firm, you know, I've had some great mentors with Mike Gore and Jack McElroy that really have kind of shown me the practice of law. And again, going back to it's not a sprint, it's a marathon, hang in there, do the right thing, if you make a mistake tell the client, and it will be okay, we'll get you through it. So --

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Well, Eric, I -- you know, as we get ready to launch into your year as the president of the Orange County Bar Association, I just want to say how much in the judiciary we appreciate your partnership. We consider the OCBA and its leadership some of our greatest collaborators on those things that matter to the community and those things that matter for us in the judiciary.

We didn't talk about it on the air, but as I walked in here I'd just come from a Town Hall meeting where hundreds of members of the Bar joined us to talk about our newest Civil Case Management Program. And I'm so grateful for that partnership.

I look forward to working together with you, and I wish you the best in your year.

ERIC REED: Judge Myers, thank you. And likewise with the collaboration between the Ninth Judicial Circuit and the Orange County Bar. I think if we were apart, we would not be able to do what we can do. And I want to thank you and all the Judges in the Ninth as well.

CHIEF JUDGE MYERS: Great. Thank you.

NARRATOR: You've been listening to "Open Ninth: Conversations Beyond the Courtroom" brought to you by Chief Judge Donald A. Myers, Jr., and the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida. For more information about the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court, follow us on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

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