

Making It

By Katherine Shaver
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Tell lawyers they must undergo ethics training, and you will likely hear groans about an often mind-numbing, if important, subject. But if the lawyers attend one of Jack Marshall's seminars, they might end up listening to a mini-rock concert or watching a twist on the "Twilight Zone" series.

Six years ago, Jack, 57, of Alexandria, left a legal career (he maintains bar memberships in the District and Massachusetts) to run ProEthics Ltd. The company conducts legal and corporate ethics training, including seminars on sexual harassment issues. His niche: ethics as entertainment.

"The whole point is to put people at ease, so they're not just sitting back and falling asleep," Jack says. In typical ethics courses, he says, "people would just sit and go through the rule book. It was deadly."

Last year, he says, he conducted seminars for dozens of law firms, private companies, governments groups and bar associations across the country. In a seminar titled "Ethics Rock!," a guitarist sings stories of ethical quandaries. The Beatles tune "A Day in the Life" becomes "A Day in Court," about the limits of "zealous representation." Don McLean's "American Pie" morphs into "The Day My Ethics Died."

Jack conducts the seminars and hires local singers and actors for the performances. He charges local organizations about \$3,500 for a basic three-hour program, with additional fees for the actors, musicians, travel expenses or customized material. Last year, he says, his company took in about \$235,000, supplying enough profit to support him, his wife, Grace, and their 13-year-old son, Grant.

The business idea came naturally, Jack says. "I've always led a double life in theater and the law." He formed a student theater group while attending Georgetown University Law Center in the early 1970s. While working a series of untraditional law jobs -- including fundraising for the Georgetown law school and running a research arm of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce -- he ran a now-defunct professional musical comedy troupe that did legal and political satire.

He says he inherited his interest in ethics from his father, Jack Marshall Sr., 87, of Arlington, who was a lawyer.

He started working in ethics as a side job in 1993, writing comedic sketches for another training company. When the head of that company moved on, Jack says, he took over some of the clients and started ProEthics as a part-time business while working in marketing full time for a New Jersey legal consulting firm. He left that position in 2002 to make ProEthics his full-time job.

Still, theater is never far from his mind. In his not-so-spare time, he works as the volunteer CEO and artistic director for American Century Theater in Arlington, which he helped start in 1994.

Lalla Shishkevish, director of continuing legal education for the D.C. Bar, says Jack's courses are a big hit.

"He makes people have to think and participate," she says, "but always in a way that's entertaining."

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SEMINARS THAT SING: Jack Marshall brings a theatrical touch to legal lessons. (Copyright Keith Barraclough)

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