

# Making It Personal: TAKING CLIENTS' INTERESTS TO HEART

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L-R Laura Manfreda,  
Frances Knox, Lisa Godfrey

There is a lot of injustice in the world today. People are often put in legal situations that endanger their health, livelihood, and personal life. Knowing your legal rights and having a legal team are invaluable tools in today's litigious society, but having the ideal legal team can be somewhat of a challenge. Who can you trust? How do you pick a good attorney? What questions do you ask them when screening attorneys? And how can you differentiate between a law firm that sees you as a number and one that values you as an individual and regards your case as a priority?

The main goal of most people who are involved in a legal situation is to get sound advice and a fair result. And that's exactly what Frances Knox, Lisa Godfrey, and Laura Manfreda of Knox, Brotherton, Knox & Godfrey offer their clients. These women understand that their clients have a lot at stake and that they are placing a great deal of trust and faith in them as their legal council. As a result, Frances, Lisa, and Laura all practice the philosophy that they owe it to their clients to do everything in their power to provide service that goes above and beyond. Too often clients leave their lawyer's office or the court feeling as if they've been treated as a case number, receiving little personal attention from their attorney. But

Frances, Lisa, and Laura take pride in working for a full-service firm that, for more than 40

years, has striven to make a difference for real people with real problems. They realize that every individual is different, and they make every attempt to get to know that individual and understand his or her objectives. They discuss each alternative with clients and explore the pros and cons so that clients can make the best decision for their specific needs and goals, because, as Frances shares, "We try to shepherd our clients along the way so that they feel and know that we have their best interests at heart. We encourage their phone calls and always return calls. The practice of law is a trust that we hold high and value."

When it comes to their relationship with their lawyer, most clients, according to Lisa, "want to know that someone is on their side and working hard on their behalf." And given the background, experience, knowledge, and philosophy of the women of Knox, Brotherton, Knox & Godfrey, clients can breathe easy in that regard.

Frances, a senior partner in the firm, has been involved with the law for over 20 years, but only received her juris doctorate from Wake Forest School of Law when she was 41 years old, a feat she considers one of her greatest personal accomplishments. It was while working as a paralegal that she discovered her passion for law. She was taken aback by the disparity in the bargaining power between

big businesses and individuals after watching a very poor client struggle with an insurance company. That inequity inspired her to go to law school, where upon graduation she made it her mantra to work to protect the underdog against big business. She commuted daily from Charlotte to Wake Forest School of Law in Winston-Salem.

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Frances specializes in personal injury cases associated with traffic accidents, nursing home negligence, and medical malpractice. Frances has many personal and professional goals, there is one that she truly embraces and that is, "My professional goal is to enjoy what I'm doing as long as I can. And as my husband and law partner Eddie Knox always tells us, "Always be honest in what you do and say and you never have to worry about the future."

Lisa, who is also a partner in the Charlotte office of Knox, Brotherton, Knox & Godfrey, has practiced with the firm since 1983. She handles a variety of legal matters, including business and personal injury litigation, construction law, business formations, and transactional work.

Lisa has more than 25 years of legal experience

both in and out of the courtroom, and she is known by her colleagues as the attorney who “never loses her cool.” She also has a knack for putting her clients at ease and showing them something humorous about their situation, no matter how dire. In fact, it is not uncommon to hear laughter from the conference room where she is meeting with clients.

But Lisa knows when to be serious and knows what it takes to be successful at her job: being prepared, knowing the law, and working hard for your clients. And while this strategy has brought her a great deal of success in the courtroom, she notes that “the most satisfying part of my job is knowing that I have done the very best I can do for a client.”

## TIPS FOR FAMILY LAW

- **Confide in Your Attorney.** Your attorney is there to help you through this difficult process. Don't hold back. Something that may be considered unimportant to you may be considered crucial to your attorney.
- **Know Your Rights.** If you do not understand a point made by your attorney, make sure you ask him or her to clarify. Take notes during the meeting to refer to later.
- **Gather Documents.** Gather your tax returns, bank statements, retirement information, real estate documents, and any other papers that reflect income and debts of both husband and wife.
- **You Have a Right to Be Heard.** Many times clients will feel guilty and lose their confidence once a matter is before the judge. Stresses Laura: “If you find yourself in the courtroom against your spouse, you should acknowledge that you have a right to be heard.”
- **Do Not Be Discouraged.** Resolving legal issues takes time and patience. There can be several court hearings to decide certain issues or a lengthy negotiating period between the attorneys. But Laura encourages clients to “Hang in there—we are here to help you through it and to obtain the best outcome for you.”

Laura is the only female attorney at Knox, Brotherton, Knox & Godfrey who handles family law. She represents clients with cases involving spousal support, child custody, child support, and equitable distribution.

As a family law attorney, Laura spends most of her time in the courtroom, negotiating with attorneys and meeting with clients, often over divorce and child custody issues—two aspects of the law that are often very emotional for clients and their families. Laura understands that divorce is a life-altering experience, and she knows that it can be difficult for clients to open up to their lawyers about their marriages, so she strives to be someone that her clients can talk to and confide in. Laura also understands that issues related to divorce are not only complicated and emotional, but that child custody issues can be frustrating and wearisome as well.

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As the youngest woman lawyer at Knox, Brotherton, Knox & Godfrey, Laura relies on the support and experience of Francis and Lisa. She says of her colleagues: “They are both invaluable mentors and friends—I am lucky to be surrounded by such a wealth of knowledge and experience.”

In the years that they have been practicing law, both Frances and Lisa have witnessed a vast change in the role of women in the legal profession. But both Frances and Lisa believe that to be successful in the legal world, it is crucial for a woman to believe in herself and stand up firmly for her position. These are personality traits that need to be instilled in girls at an early age, Frances stresses, stating: “It troubles me that young girls, even in middle school, feel they have to garner their self esteem from others. My parents taught me to believe in myself and not rely on anyone else.”

Despite the injustice that plagues our world today, there is help in the form of lawyers who really care—lawyers like the ladies of Knox, Brotherton, Knox & Godfrey. And while it's true that many lawyers have risen to heights of fame and fortune, the “glory” in the law for Frances, Lisa, and Laura comes from using it to help others. Perhaps Frances said it best when she said, “I love helping people and seeing the rewards of providing good service. I did not go to school to make a lot of money, but to make the lives of others easier.”

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