

## **Sovana, Italy is a Perfect Location for an Eight-day Seminar on Civility for Lawyers**

Sovana is a rural place, steeped in history and filled with the kind of tranquility that opens one's spirit to calmness and ultimately to reflection. It lies in the remarkable Tuscan countryside near the ancient cities of Sorano and Pitigliano, surrounded at each turn with remnants of ancient civilizations. It speaks to one's senses as one walks through olive groves, vineyards -- as one stops to hear birds in the forest, or a babbling brook beside a road hand carved more than 2,000 years ago.

Sovana is at the very heart of the Etruscan civilization that flourished for centuries before Roman rule. It is reputed to have had a population of 20,000 six centuries B.C. The Etruscan culture preceded and then overlapped the Greeks. Aristotle wrote of Savanna. Etruscan values recognized the equality of women and men, a respect for the rights of homosexuals, and treatment of servants as human beings, not property.

*Civitas* (the Latin term on which "civil" and "civility" are based) is sometimes defined as people living under the same laws and, when in alliance with Rome, considered to be free. Civility is often referred to today as acting politely and with courtesy. The concept is derived from roots applicable to a highly developed society and culture (perhaps from the Etruscan example) carrying with it respect for the rights and obligations of others, both collectively and individually.

We frankly are concerned about a seeming breakdown of civility in the legal profession. Lawyers are positioned in society as the interpreters and, if you will, enforcers of civil law. If they don't act in a civil manner toward each other, what example is left for our society and the foundation on which it is based? We have all seen and heard of fellow lawyers acting badly, at times taking the adversarial process to its extreme limits. It leads to lack of respect for each other and the legal process. Ultimately, it undermines the system on which our way of life is based.

From time to time, as I reflect on the subject of civility in our profession, it seems that the loss of civility is derived in part from a view by both clients and attorneys that lawyers are "gladiators" at law, trained to overcome and sometimes figuratively slaughter their opponents using whatever means that get results. I have had lawyers tell me they were paid to be "a -- holes." The notion of lawyers being "counselors at law," legal advisors, and -- in a very real sense -- peacemakers, seems to lie in the background. The poor reputation many lawyers have is well deserved. We have become less civilized as we have become lost in the hunt, losing track of the ideals and sense of purpose that underlies our legal system. When I can, I ask clients, "What do you think would be a fair result and how can we get there?" I consider, "What is the other party's view based on, and is there a solution that serves the interests of both parties?" We can all approach the law as healers and mediators if we choose -- although such a notion may be farfetched for many.

Being in Sovana, in this beautiful setting, provided an opportunity for such contemplation that was enhanced by the quality of discourse shared with the other participants. This time away -- away from families, clients, the stress of legal practice -- creates a window to reflect, to contemplate, and then to explore new or altered ways of conducting ourselves and influencing others in our chosen profession.

**James E. Hadley**

*Member, Ryan, Swanson & Cleveland, PLLC*  
Participant in October 2011 CLE