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Of Professional Interest

My Son The Lawyer Doctor

by James R. Bell, J.D.

In 1973 I donned the doctoral robes (the robe with the three stripes on each sleeve does not mean *sergeant* it means *Doctor*) to formally receive the degree of Juris (or Jurum) Doctor (J.D.). Each year several persons receive the highly sought after J.D. degree and thereafter apply this specialized educational training to new, challenging experiences in the practice of law, teaching, and in the business community. However, only a few of these persons ever outwardly connect the degree with the title *Dr.*

Certainly, the majority (maybe all) of law schools in existence today require a Bachelor's level of education as a prerequisite for admittance to law school and, upon successful completion, confer the J.D. degree. Curiously, only a very small minority of persons receiving the J.D. degree are referred to, or refer to themselves, as "Doctor." Why? Is it because we are still in a changeover period from the days of the bachelor of laws (LL.B.) degree to the days of the J.D. degree?

Time after time, in the legal publications, articles appear and include a brief biographical sketch of the author which is generally stated as follows:

John J. Professional received a B.S. in Business from XYZ University in 1972 and a J.D. from the University of ABC in 1975. Mr. Professional is presently an associate with McCann, Hertz and Howe.

Actually, Mr. Professional is *Dr.* Professional, so why not say so? Is it ignorance? Impossible! Is it merely

a product of the above-mentioned changeover period where uncertainty and caution reign supreme? I do not know the answer, but I strongly believe there is a vast amount of uncertainty among recipients of the J.D. degree concerning where they stand on the use of the title "Dr." Returning briefly to the above-mentioned biographical sketch, it seems that such uncertainty is often avoided in the following manner:

John J. Professional received a B.S. in Business from XYZ University in 1972 and a J.D. from the University of ABC in 1975. He is presently . . . He this, He that, He the other thing (how's that for avoidance?).

Understandably, several questions can arise relating to the granting of this degree. Although, as stated before, the J.D. is probably universally conferred at present, but there were literally hundreds of LL.B. recipients who were later notified by their alma mater that a J.D. was now being awarded and that they could have one for a fee of \$25.00. This way of receiving a J.D. could understandably raise a question about the title. However, this is merely the belated receipt of a long overdue, *earned* degree, fully within the degree granting powers of the associated educational institution. If this is questioned then consider the authority to grant *honorary* degrees.

Another question arises in that some recipients of the LL.B. or J.D. were not required to earn undergraduate degrees (some law schools

required 60 or 90 credits for admittance) prior to entering law school. Are they therefore entitled to a legitimate doctorate? Why not? This has also been true of several other doctoral programs. Furthermore there is a present trend by many highly reputable institutions to offer a six-year accelerated program after high school leading to an M.D., J.D. or other doctoral degrees.

A "doctorate" is defined as "the degree, title, or rank of a doctor." *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* 333 (1981) (hereinafter Webster's.) "Doctor" is defined as "a person who has earned one of the highest academic degrees." *Id.* There are dozens of recognized doctorates conferred by fully accredited institutions. A few are listed below:

- D.B.A.—Doctor of Business Administration
- D.Ch.E.—Doctor of Chemical Engineering
- D.D.—Doctor of Divinity
- D.D.S.—Doctor of Dental Science; Doctor of Dental Surgery
- D.Litt.—Doctor of Letters; Doctor of Literature

