

By Mike Campbell

When I attended the annual Highway Safety and Traffic Blueprint Conference last year, other attendees frequently asked me the same question: "Why are you here?"

They weren't asking arrogantly, but more out of confusion. This was a traffic safety conference, not the annual MATA Conference after all. I was equally confused by the question until I found my rhythm and began answering it pretty easily: "We're all safety advocates, just like the police and healthcare professionals who are here." I told them we're all on the same side and working toward the same goals. I came to this realization as I sat and listened to health care professionals speak, transportation officials give presentations, and police officers describe the dangers of driving without a seatbelt or while distracted.

But, how do we fit in the scheme of public safety, among such honored professionals like police officers and doctors? Well, consider an automobile wreck: Police officers can respond to the scene and investigate the circumstances of the crash, and even forward charges to the prosecutor who can hold the wrongdoer accountable for criminal acts in causing the wreck. Healthcare professionals can do everything they can to render medical assistance and aid to the victim.

Although noble and crucial, the efforts of law enforcement and healthcare officials are just one component of a car wreck victim's journey toward being made whole. That journey is not complete without the assistance of a trial lawyer who will go to the mat and fight for the compensation the victim needs. A wrongdoer can be prosecuted and a victim can (hopefully) return to some semblance of health, but ultimately it is up to the legal profession to ensure the victim gets her day in court and is made completely whole.

We do more than just stand with the victims though; we take proactive steps to prevent injury and deaths from occurring. At a recent conference, I learned of a young trial attorney who convinced a Judge to enter interlocutory orders recalling thousands of defective products because of

how dangerous these products were to average people and the immediate need to protect the safety of consumers.

I've heard legends of trial warriors who would learn of a defect in a product and write a series of letters pleading with a company to remove the product from the marketplace. We have members like Kurt Larson, who started Missouri Safe and Sober, a statewide organization that is saving lives and keeping drunk drivers off of the road. National efforts, like those of attorney Joel Feldman, are centered on ending distracted driving and have likely saved countless lives.

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There is no doubt that our jobs are difficult, sometimes thankless, and often times ridiculed. The next time you hear a lawyer joke, just consider your place in making sure that wrongs get righted and that victims can get justice. If you have time, volunteer to speak at a school on behalf of End Distracted Driving (enddd.org) or consider how you can help with organizations like Missouri and Safe Sober. You can even volunteer your efforts, if you're so inclined, to speak at City Council meetings and the

Missouri legislature about the dangers of distracted driving and how we are all affected by poor driving habits.

Consider attending a safety conference, or hand out free bike helmets at your firm. Share your stories, advocate for your clients, and consider what you can proactively do in your community to make it safer. At the end of the day, we're not ambulance chasers or greedy or predatory, we are safety advocates. It's time we let the world know more about that.