

## Lawyers in Film: Top 10 lessons from 'My Cousin Vinnie'

By: Mark J. Moretti | August 24, 2017



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1. A judge being strict and a stickler for the rules does not mean a judge isn't fair. Fred Gwynne's portrayal of Judge Haller is a great case in point. Know the judge's rules and follow them.
2. Dress for court. It's not the place for wild ties, really short skirts or purple tuxedos. Dress conservatively. There is an unofficial dress code and while you may not be held in contempt like Vinnie, you won't score goodwill points with the judge or jury if you violate the rules.
3. There is a professional fellowship among lawyers (though it may not always be appreciated by clients) whereby you try to beat each other's brains out in court, but can have a drink or share your hunting cabin with them afterwards.
4. Brilliant cross examination comes about with leg work and doing your homework. Talk to the witnesses. Visit the scene so you can see the trees and bushes from the witnesses' standpoint. Make some grits yourself to see how long it takes.
5. There is a power and drama to demonstrative evidence like Vinnie's demonstration of the witness's impaired vision. But don't let the perceived drama of the moment overtake the risks involved like OJ unsuccessfully being asked to try on gloves.
6. There is a lasting impression we can make on the next generation of lawyers by being a mentor. The inspiration which Judge Malloy gave Vinnie is touching. Many of us have benefitted from an encouraging word from a judge or senior lawyer early in our career.
7. The tone of Vinnie's "I get it" resulted in a night in jail. When you address the court, show respect, not just in your words, but in your manner. If you believe you are being treated unfairly, make a record but do not abuse the position of the judge who has been duly elected to make the calls, be they right or wrong.
8. As a lawyer you think about your case all the time. You never know when inspiration or a new idea or perspective might arise. Vinnie seeing the tire tracks with a new perspective hit him after seeing the same picture dozens of times.
9. There is a real danger in taking on work before you are equipped to handle it. It's a little scary that Vinnie's first trial is a murder case. It all came out well in the end, but one can imagine Vinnie being prosecuted for false impersonation and a murder conviction being overturned for ineffective assistance of counsel.
10. Being a good expert witness is more than simply having the knowledge. The confidence, tone and unshakable certitude projected by your expert witness makes all the difference. Be it explaining a dripping faucet or the tire marks on the road, Vinnie's girlfriend (Ms. Vito) projected that confidence.

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