



Top Lawyers: Andaleeb “Andi” Geloo On The 5 Things You Need To Become A Top Lawyer In Your Specific Field of Law

An Interview with Eric L. Pines



Eric L. Pines · 14 min read · Dec 5, 2022



Compassion, the ability to listen, perseverance, humility, and assertiveness are five things I think one needs to become a top lawyer. A story I have that I

feel exemplifies these traits happened in April of 2022.

. . .

The legal field is known to be extremely competitive. Lawyers are often smart, ambitious, and highly educated. That being said, what does it take to stand out and become a “Top Lawyer” in your specific field of law? In this interview series called “[5 Things You Need To Become A Top Lawyer In Your Specific Field of Law](#)”, we are talking to top lawyers who share what it takes to excel and stand out in your industry.

As a part of this interview series, I had the pleasure of interviewing Andaleeb “Andi” Geloo.

Andi Geloo is a first-generation immigrant Muslim, lawyer, and author of “Andi’s Law,” which helps to protect victims of anonymous online defamation and bullying. Throughout the past 16 years, Andi’s practice has primarily focused on criminal and traffic matters in the General District Court and the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, and she has handled civil matters in the Fairfax County General District Court. In addition to her criminal defense practice, Andi also handles pro bono matters to help others receive justice in this area.

. . .

Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series. Before we dig in, our readers would love to get to know you a bit more. What is the “backstory” that brought you to this particular career path in Law? Did you want to be an attorney “when you grew up”?

When I was five years old, my family moved to the United States from Pakistan. In the early years, we didn’t have a lot of money, and my parents each worked very hard to provide me and my siblings with everything we needed to thrive and be happy. Growing up in the United States and being raised by immigrant parents has given me the gift to see the world from two very different perspectives: a place where if one works hard, they can realize their dreams, and a place where people who are different are marginalized and not treated like they have value. There have been times in my life when, due to immigrating from another country, I have been treated like I didn’t matter, like I was invisible, and yet I have been able to achieve the goals I’ve set for myself.

My motivation to pursue a career in law initially came from my desire to help other immigrants access the rights endowed to them by the United States, to ensure that those within my scope of influence would never be made to feel the invisibility that my own immigrant family felt. I often take on cases pro bono to help those in difficult situations receive justice, and I have always wanted my clients to know that I saw them, that I heard them, and that they mattered.

Can you tell us a bit about the nature of your practice and what you focus on?

Throughout the past 16 years, my practice has primarily focused on criminal and traffic matters in the General District Court and the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, and I have handled civil matters in the Fairfax County General District Court. Local organizations also reach out to me for assistance on sympathetic matters outside of these areas, which I regularly handle pro-bono.

You are a successful attorney. Which three character traits do you think were most instrumental to your success? What unique qualities do you have that others may not? Can you please share a story or example for each?

I practice empathy in my work. Empathy is so important when it comes to working with people who are coming from all different backgrounds and places in their life. When putting myself in my clients' shoes, I feel like I have a better understanding of their needs and how to help them. My engagement with empathy and trying to relate to my clients has been instrumental in my success. The fact that I don't need to advertise my services is a testimony to this.

Determination and assertiveness are two other traits I have benefitted from, professionally and personally. There have been many times when I have had to speak up for myself and not allow people to walk all over me. Being assertive has allowed me to do the same for my clients. Sometimes it may seem easy to remain silent and not go against the grain, but that kind of submissiveness wouldn't make me the kind of lawyer I want to be. I find that determination is at the center of being empathetic and assertive. I am determined to be my client's voice and fight for the justice they deserve, and I am also determined to be someone they feel gets them and cares.

I once observed a judge berate a Muslim man petitioning for a restricted license for the purposes of driving to his mosque, something the statute allowed the gentleman to do. The judge asked a pointed question to the man about his religion, thus revealing the judge's personal bias. This was the last day of Ramadan and I had been fasting myself. Undeniably angry, I maintained my composure and spoke up on behalf of this citizen, reminding the judge that the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution says that everyone in the United States has the right to practice their own religion, and requiring this petitioner to answer such a question about his religion was in essence shaming him and placing a burden on a privilege the statute afforded him. The judge seemed to almost recoil when I stood up for the gentleman and granted the petition.

What I found equally disturbing to the judge's deplorable behavior was the reaction from several of my colleagues who stated that I should have "stayed quiet." Upon inquiry, they stated that this is "just who the judge is" and that I should have "let it go."

In my view, the attitude and culture of allowing this conduct to exist, especially from the bench, is my greatest motivation to fight and speak out. This is the kind of determination and raised voice we need to enact change, especially against problems like bigotry and racism. I was determined to do something. (Thankfully, this incident was reported to the sitting chief judge at the time, Penney Azcarate, who took swift action and removed this judge from the bench.)

Do you think you have had luck in your success? Can you explain what you mean?

I am the youngest of three children raised by my parents, Hashim Geloo and Noorbano Karim, both of whom were born in India and later settled in Pakistan. My childhood was deeply impacted by the courageous choices made by my parents throughout their lives. As young children, both of my parents escaped India with their families to Pakistan under threat to their lives due to the religious violence created after the Indian partition. After my siblings and I were born in Pakistan, my parents made the decision to immigrate to America in hopes of better opportunities and freedom for our family. One week after we arrived in the United States, I started kindergarten in Falls Church, Virginia. My first year, I was rather quiet because I neither understood nor spoke the English language. Each day in school was a struggle, not only because of the language barrier but the cultural and religious differences which made things very difficult for me.

Growing up, I had to work much harder in school than my peers and overcome extreme xenophobia exhibited by teachers and students alike. With the support and encouragement of my parents and a drive within me, I became a top student in school, something that continued throughout my education. (I came to America knowing no English and by the time I was in the 2nd grade, I was winning spelling bees!)

I am very fortunate to have parents who instilled in me a hard work ethic and showed me how perseverance along with determination can help me reach the level of success I want for myself. I have had to work for every accomplishment I achieved; luck has never been part of my story, unless you count being lucky to have the best parents ever.

Do you think where you went to school has any bearing on your success? How important is it for a lawyer to go to a top-tier school?

I attended and graduated from George Washington Law School with high honors. While I feel honored to have graduated from a top-tier school, I firmly believe that my hard work, perseverance, and decision to work with integrity are the primary factors to my success. While attending a top-tier school has its advantages, hard work and having a passion for practicing law is paramount to a lawyer's success.

Based on the lessons you have learned from your experience, if you could go back in time and speak to your twenty-year-old self, what would you say? Would you do anything differently?

When I came to this country, I was ostracized for being different because of where I came from. It was painful being treated so poorly by my peers. Gradually, as I gained confidence through my academic successes and my parents' support, I felt more powerful in that I learned how I could accomplish great things when I put my mind to what I wanted to do. If I could go back in time and speak to my younger self, the girl who was bullied and felt alone and small, I would tell her to trust that the world will change one day and that all challenges and obstacles are gifts. Failures are there to show you how to progress and grow stronger.

This is not easy work. What is your primary motivation and drive behind the work that you do?

My primary motivation is to empower others to have the confidence to make themselves be heard. This is why I practice law. I work to help lend a voice to those who feel they have none and to those who have their voice quieted. I fight fiercely for people who have been subjected to bullies, both in and out of the courtroom. And yes, this is hard work, but when I see how I've helped someone, it makes all the effort so worth it.

What are some of the most interesting or exciting projects you are working on now?

A focus of mine has been helping people who've been on the receiving end of harassment and bullying, in and out of the courtroom. Recently, I have been focused on preventing corrupt and wayward judges from continuing to sit. This has been an ongoing problem for many years. Judges who've been deemed unfit to serve are able to continue to judge cases because of a legal loophole. Citizens and lawyers are being treated unjustly by such judges and this is what I am working to stop. This work I am doing is exciting because it would mean less corruption in our justice system, which is a win for everyone, but it will also allow lawyers the ability to do their jobs more fully.

After observing a wayward judge mistreat a struggling woman by demeaning her and refusing to appoint her a lawyer, which violated her rights, I wrote an op-ed titled "Wayward Judges," which was published in Virginia Lawyer's Weekly. I wrote the article to raise awareness for the current system of corruption in our courtrooms. While I found this woman and successfully represented her pro bono, this op-ed received an overwhelmingly positive response and support from the citizens and drew the attention of many lawmakers.

Where do you go from here? Where do you aim to be in the next chapter of your career?

Virginia State Senator Chap Petersen was instrumental in judicial reform, especially as it related to the removal of the wayward judges mentioned in the op-ed I referenced in the previous question; he and Delegate Kathleen Murphy took great care and listened to citizens' concerns regarding their experiences. Chap Petersen is now drafting legislation to limit the judicial allowance that is continuing to be given to these judges, despite their proven record of abuse. I am so proud to be working directly with Senator Chap Petersen on some of this legislation. This has been a problem I have been trying to get help with for a while and feel very optimistic about seeing some much-needed change.

I am also expanding "Waterfalls," which is my water project that I founded in honor of my beloved dad and humanitarian, Hashim Geloo. We build wells in impoverished areas throughout the world and each well is dedicated to a cause that is important to us: ending violence against women, poverty, bullying, and death by suicide.

Without sharing anything confidential, can you please share your most successful "war story"? Can you share the funniest?

One thing I've realized is the importance of levity while dealing with opposing counsel. I was representing a client on driving on a suspended charge, which carried up to a year in jail and further suspension of my client's driving privileges. The client was a young father of four children,

ages 3, 4, 6 and 7 years old. He was an immigrant who supported his family as a cab driver. A punishment involving a loss of license would severely impact this family who had already struggled financially and faced many hardships, which warranted my pro bono services. At the time, the driving on suspended statute mandated a suspension if the client was convicted. I had to avoid a conviction. The prosecutor assigned to the case was not willing to consider alternative non-criminal dispositions and I was moving forward with the trial. Neither one of us was willing to compromise and things got a bit heated.

The case was set for trial. As the start of the prosecution's case began, he asked the court for permission to proceed without his jacket as he left it in another courtroom. I am not sure what came over me, but I decided to object. My argument was that I had to wear my jacket, so he must wear his. The entire courtroom burst into laughter, as did the two of us and the judge. My client was acquitted and to this day, the prosecutor and I are the closest of friends. Not only was this a win, but a nice moment to come out of something that could have ended differently.



Excellent. Here is the main question of our interview. What are your “5 Things You Need To Become A Top Lawyer In Your Specific Field of Law?” Please share a story or an example for each.

Compassion, the ability to listen, perseverance, humility, and assertiveness are five things I think one needs to become a top lawyer. A story I have that I

feel exemplifies these traits happened in April of 2022. I came into Ms. Jane Doe's case, pro bono, on appeal in Stafford County through our Mosque after the client accepted a jail deal in General District Court with another attorney who was not aware of her immigration status. I assisted the woman with noting her appeal and we hired local counsel on her behalf as I did not practice in this county. While I was not the attorney of record on appeal, I assisted local counsel behind the scenes as much as I could. At this time, the offer that was given to Ms. Doe involved active jail time (ten days) and two pleas to crimes of moral turpitude. Not much different from what she accepted in General District Court with her previous attorney. For obvious immigration reasons, the offer was not acceptable. Seven months later, this offer remained the same. During this time, I was in daily contact with Ms. Doe, and as time wore on, I grew more concerned for this young mother's mental well-being.

This concern I had for Ms. Doe's welfare compelled me to seek permission from the counsel on record to enter my appearance and draft Ms. Doe's story to the elected commonwealth attorney, Mr. Olsen whom I had met previously that year to discuss community outreach efforts. In a mere two hours after sending that email, I received an offer: Nolle Prosequiall of the charges — 3 immediately and the final after 90 days without a plea or stipulation. After seven long months of litigation, a woman was saved from being taken from her children and no longer in the grips of an emotional breakdown because I shared her story. The commonwealth attorney thanked me for informing them of Ms. Doe's story, as it helped them realize exactly what was at stake for her. The case was resolved and all charges were dismissed.

We are very blessed that some of the biggest names in Business, VC funding, Sports, and Entertainment read this column. Is there a person in the world, or in the US with whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch, and why? He or she might see this. :-)

Mark Laita is one of my heroes. He creates singular content focused on the lives of the people who are typically forgotten and neglected by much of society; he brings to light their stories by sharing them with the world. Laita travels throughout the US and interviews the people he meets along the way, recording stories of homelessness and poverty, sexual abuse, crime/punishment, addiction, etc. His willingness to listen to someone else's story and share their struggle is heartwarming and impressive. I would be enriched to have breakfast not only with Mark but with one of his subjects, knowing that I'd be walking away a better and more enlightened person than I was before.

This was very inspiring. Thank you so much for the time you spent with this. We wish you continued success and good health!

. . .

A *bout the Interviewer: Eric L. Pines is a nationally recognized federal employment lawyer, mediator, and attorney business coach. He represents federal employees and acts as in-house counsel for over fifty thousand federal employees through his work as a federal employee labor union representative. A formal federal employee himself, Mr. Pines began his federal employment law career as in-house counsel for AFGC Local 1923 which is in Social Security*

Administration's headquarters and is the largest federal union local in the world. He presently serves as AFGE 1923's Chief Counsel as well as in-house counsel for all FEMA bargaining unit employees and numerous Department of Defense and Veteran Affairs unions.

While he and his firm specialize in representing federal employees from all federal agencies and in reference to virtually all federal employee matters, his firm has placed special attention on representing Veteran Affairs doctors and nurses hired under the authority of Title. He and his firm have a particular passion in representing disabled federal employees with their requests for medical and religious reasonable accommodations when those accommodations are warranted under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (ADA). He also represents them with their requests for Federal Employee Disability Retirement (OPM) when an accommodation would not be possible.

Mr. Pines has also served as a mediator for numerous federal agencies including serving a year as the Library of Congress' in-house EEO Mediator. He has also served as an expert witness in federal court for federal employee matters. He has also worked as an EEO technical writer drafting hundreds of Final Agency Decisions for the federal sector.

Mr. Pines' firm is headquartered in Houston, Texas and has offices in Baltimore, Maryland and Atlanta, Georgia. His first passion is his wife and five children. He plays classical and rock guitar and enjoys playing ice hockey, running, and biking. Please visit his websites at www.pinesfederal.com and www.toughinjurylawyers.com. He can also be reached at eric@pinesfederal.com.

Business



Published in Authority Magazine

15.5K followers · Last published 2 hours ago

In-depth Interviews with Authorities in Business, Pop Culture, Wellness, Social Impact, and Tech. We use interviews to draw out stories that are both empowering and actionable.



Written by Eric L. Pines

129 followers · 1 following

Eric L. Pines is a nationally recognized federal employment lawyer, mediator, and attorney business coach

No responses yet

