

A FULL-SPECTRUM LAW SCHOOL

IN MAY, OUTGOING DEAN ROBERT C. POST '77 AND INCOMING DEAN HEATHER GERKEN SAT DOWN FOR A WIDE-RANGING CONVERSATION ABOUT YALE LAW SCHOOL—THE ROLE OF ITS DEAN AND FACULTY, THE IMPORTANCE OF ITS STRONG ALUMNI NETWORKS, THE SCHOOL'S ROLE AS A LEADER IN LEGAL EDUCATION, AND ITS DYNAMISM. THE FOLLOWING IS AN EDITED AND CONDENSED PORTION OF THEIR CONVERSATION, MORE OF WHICH CAN BE VIEWED AT LAW.YALE.EDU/POST-GERKEN.

Heather Gerken: What would you say are the things that you're most proud of building in your time as dean?

Robert Post: First, I tried to develop a kind of education that focused on policy, threading the needle between scholarship and legal, clinical practice. Yale University does not have a public policy school, and I wanted to make the Law School a center for those desiring to shape public policy. Because so many young faculty have arrived here with centers oriented toward developing public policy, the School has in fact moved substantially in that direction.

So YLS now offers a full spectrum education. It teaches students how to be a lawyer, how to practice, how to be a policy entrepreneur who creates and effectuates public policy, and how to be an academic and a theoretician of the highest quality.

Second, I wanted the school to take ownership of itself. I wanted the faculty to believe that this was their school. That meant that I had to be an honest broker to all factions of the faculty, so that the faculty could authentically experience itself as steering the school. If in the past few years we have been able to make more hires, it is because our faculty has finally had to face the fact that the responsibility for the future of the school is on their shoulders.

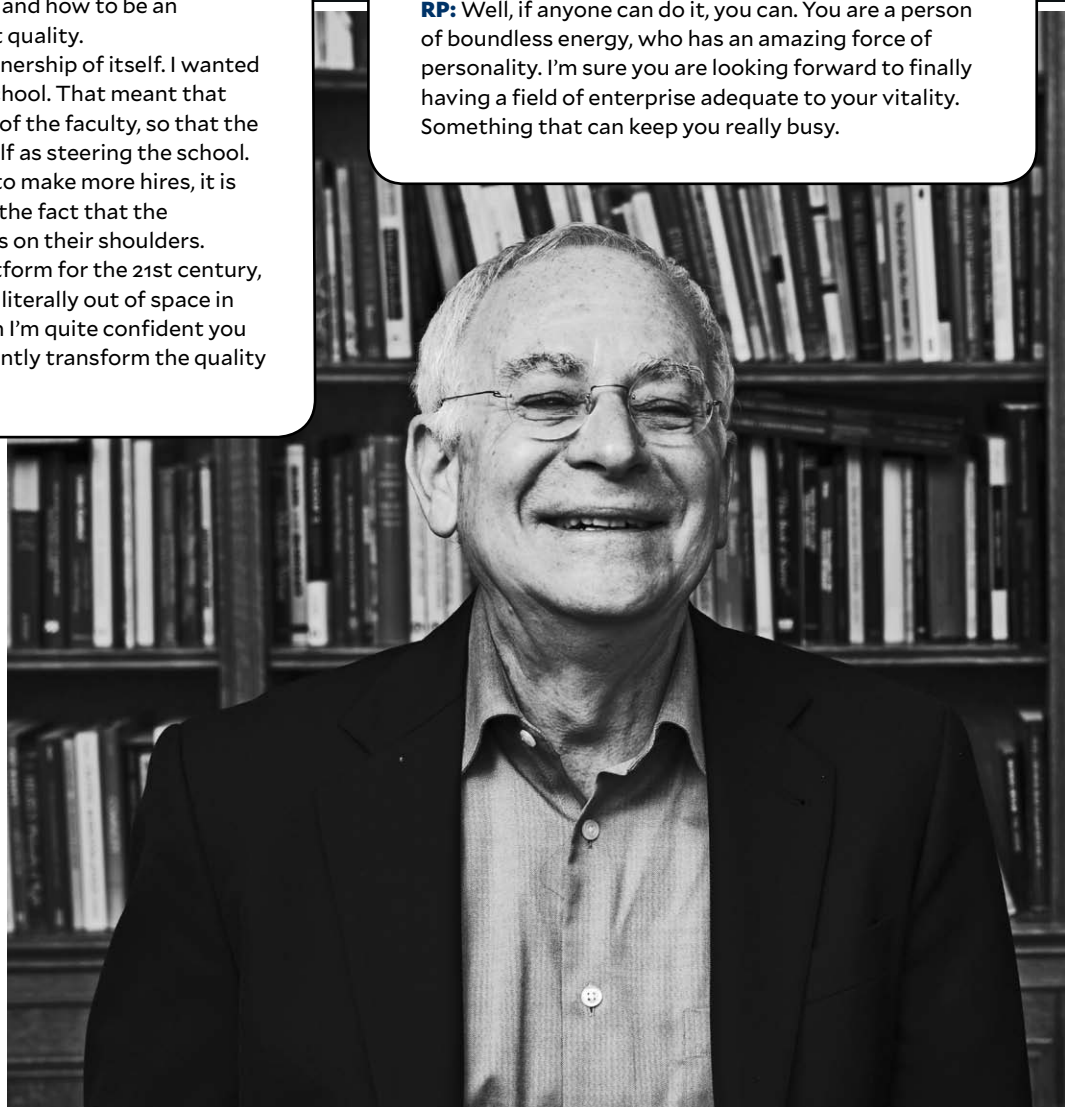
Third, I needed to create a physical platform for the 21st century, for which Baker Hall was essential. We are literally out of space in the Sterling Law Building. Baker Hall, which I'm quite confident you will build and make beautiful, will permanently transform the quality of life around this place.

RP: What are you looking forward to most when you become dean?

HG: I am really looking forward to building the same kind of place that you built for me, and that Harold and Tony and Guido built—that is, a place to do scholarship of the highest sort with the most extraordinary set of colleagues. So that's on the faculty side. I'm also really looking forward to building out as much as I can for the students. This place is remarkable. But what I love about this place is it's never been satisfied with being the greatest law school in the country. It's never enough. It's that restlessness that I really appreciate about the students.

I have this giant list of things that I think will make a difference, make the place a little bit more gracious, a little bit more interesting. It's all at the margin, at some level, when you have a place this extraordinary, but I feel like there's still a lot we can do.

RP: Well, if anyone can do it, you can. You are a person of boundless energy, who has an amazing force of personality. I'm sure you are looking forward to finally having a field of enterprise adequate to your vitality. Something that can keep you really busy.



RP: What do you have in mind to do first?

HG: I've been thinking a lot about what it is that our school owes our students. In particular, thinking about the fact that so many of our students come here as first-generation professionals, sometimes the first kids in their family to go to college. They often come here without networks. Professional networks matter; you can't pretend that they don't matter. But many of our students come here without them. What I want to do is build those networks for them. I want to imagine something like cradle-to-grave advice, from the moment that they get admitted, to put them in touch with students and alumni, until they're young alums and going forward, so that throughout their careers they have access to the extraordinary network that is the Yale law alumni. In every class of two hundred people, there's more wisdom about career choices than any faculty could have.

RP: That's fabulous. The alumni here are such a rich and wonderful a resource. It is a great and worthy ambition to bring them more fully into the life of the school. Concretely, how do you imagine doing that?

RP: That's a spectacular vision, because, of course, one of the great strengths of this institution is that we have intense alumni networks and relationships. People care about this School; they support the School, and they want to give back. They are an enormous resource waiting to be institutionally mobilized. Your plan seems exactly right.

HG: I want to start small and move bigger, because you don't want to just create a list. If you just create a list and hand the list to students, it's not going to achieve anything. I'm imagining things like mentors in residence—bringing in alumni for a couple of days at a time to counsel people, so they really get to know the students whom they're mentoring. I'm imagining building out affinity group networks. Having a reunion for our Black alumni, having a reunion for our Latino alumni. I'm imagining a clerkship network. We have hundreds of students out there who've been in the process recently.

HG: Exactly. I feel like our alumni love the Law School, but they aren't necessarily in touch with everything that's going on at this moment at the place. This is a moment when we have just diversified the class thanks to your leadership. Last year's class was the most diverse in the Law School's history. It may be we've got another record breaker this year. This is a moment when we need to pay attention to the kind of support that we provide our students. And we are in an excellent position to do so, in large part because of your foresight and leadership. I am so grateful for that. Thank you, Robert. On behalf of the entire Law School community, thank you. 🙏

