

Historic Member SPOTLIGHTS



Robert J. Kutak and Harold L. Rock

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What made these members stand out in their time?

Bob Kutak and Harold Rock were larger than life examples of what it means to be contributing members of the bar and their communities. During their lifetimes, each made unique and significant contributions to the practice of law while continuing to place an emphasis on the importance of pro bono and community service.

Kutak was often heard to say, “dream no little dreams.” Creating a national law firm focused on mutual respect with a team approach to legal work was his dream. In 1965, Kutak and Rock, along with another Nebraska lawyer, William Campbell, opened the doors to Kutak Rock & Campbell in a tiny suite in the Omaha Building (where all floors are now occupied by the firm’s largest office). Kutak was dedicated to public service and to the improvement of legal education. He was also an early and passionate believer in diversity in the hiring of attorneys and staff.¹

While Kutak was a restless visionary and Campbell a hard-charging litigator, both of whom constantly pushed to expand the firm, Rock’s more affable style provided the necessary ballast to their approaches.² Rock was a prominent figure in the Omaha legal community and the state bar association. A thoughtful and considerate man, Rock provided sage advice, particularly to those at the beginning of their careers. Known fondly at the firm as “Father Harold,” Rock brought a calming and “down to earth” presence to the practice of law and was a much beloved and unifying force at Kutak Rock.³

What challenges or barriers did they face in their career, and how did they overcome them?

As one of the “fastest-growing law firms” in 1978, there were bumps along the road toward their national law firm. While Kutak and Rock did not “get it right” 100% of the time, they and the firm’s other leaders were realistic and quick to adjust course when needed. The emphasis of asking questions about growth (as opposed to growing for growth’s sake) and the diversification of the firm’s client base has been a guiding map for those who have followed in the leadership of the firm.



Robert J. Kutak
Oct. 7, 1932 – Jan. 23, 1983



Harold L. Rock
Mar. 13, 1932 – Nov. 4, 2018

What key moments or cases defined their career?

Kutak is probably best remembered for his pioneering work as Chairman of the American Bar Association’s Special Commission on Evaluation of Professional Standards (1977-1983). Working in the post-Watergate era when the concept of self-regulation of the legal system was under attack, the 13-member Commission, universally known as the “Kutak Commission,” proposed sweeping revisions to ethical rules relating to lawyers and the practice of law. The Model Rules were approved overwhelmingly by the House of Delegates of the ABA shortly after Bob’s death and were eventually adopted in most substantive respects in 49 states. One controversial recommendation of the Commission (and of which Kutak was a strong proponent) that did not survive was a plan to require that every lawyer devote at least 40 hours annually to providing pro bono legal services.

Rock was a champion throughout his lifetime for those least able to afford legal services, and he also believed deeply in dedicating time to public service. In addition to his service within the ABA, Rock was President of the Omaha Bar Association and the Nebraska State Bar Association, Director of the Nebraska State Bar Foundation, and Chair of the Nebraska Board of Bar Examiners. He also served as Chair of the Nebraska Indigent Defense Task Force and President of the then Omaha Legal Aid Society. He was Chairman Emeritus of the Robert J. Kutak Foundation.⁴ In 2010, the Omaha Bar Association presented Rock with its Lifetime Achievement Award, citing his “exemplary service to the profession, support and service to the Omaha Bar Association, innovative contributions to improving justice, and longstanding commitment to mentoring in the law.”⁵