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An interview with a judge

Paweł Gonet – the judge with passion

*The presentation was made by
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It was 14th January when I visited the District Court in Krosno. I had one purpose – an appointment with the judge who agreed to answer some questions in my interview about his job. I was a bit nervous because I didn't know what it would be like. I expected to meet a strict, cold and serious man. This is how most people see judges – they need to be seen as respectable. To my surprise, I saw a nice man who greeted me warmly with a smile, introducing himself – Paweł Gonet.



During my visit in the Court I was able to see a courtroom – a room in which trials or other legal cases are held and judgements are made.

Next, sitting on the judges' bench I made an interview with Mr Gonet. He told me a lot of interesting things about his work and the beginnings of his career. He also told me what he thinks about the prestige of being a judge.

My first question was about the time before Mr Gonet started working as a judge. I asked him if he had always wanted to do this job or had been thinking about doing something else. He replied:



„I need to say that I wasn't even thinking about being a lawyer and in my home there weren't any law traditions. I didn't like the first years, though. But year after year, exam after exam I was more and more sure that I made a good choice. I became very fascinated by law and started thinking about my future life in the field of law. And then, something happened. During the fifth year of my studies I was on the student training in the court and then I decided to choose legal training as a judge, also I knew working as a lawyer or a prosecutor didn't match my character. ”

I asked Mr Gonet if there had been anybody who helped him to take a job in law or his success was only due to his hard work. He replied without thinking:

„Looking at the example of me and my close friends, I need to say that contacts are not so necessary. It is known that there are people who have been lawyers for generations, but in my opinion, hard work, good education and respect for your job can help you to succeed in each job.”



I know that we don't always have a job we like. It's easier to be satisfied when we do what we love, it's even better when we also earn money from it. What is it like in Mr Gonet's case?

„I take my job very seriously. I make judgements in the Criminal Department so different people's lives often depend on my decisions. I think it's my duty to do my job carefully and responsibly. The work of a judge is very dynamic- it's full of different life situations, contacts with different people so it's also the inexhaustible source of knowledge about our society. And that's why my job is also my passion, it's not only articles and laws. What I value most is a personal contact with people.”



Usually, our work takes almost half a day, but at home it isn't always possible to forget about it. My next question was:
Is it difficult to reconcile your job with your personal life?

„A judge has non-standard working time. Besides, he can't clean his desk at 3 p.m., hide all the "papers" in a drawer and just go home. I often think about the case at home, talk with my wife who is a lawyer too. I can analyse the case even for a few days. Some cases stay in my mind for years, all the pictures, people's faces, witnesses, problems I dealt with in the courtroom. However, I always tried and I'm still trying not to "bring" my job home, because my family is the most important thing for me and I want to spend as much time as I can with them.“

Our job can also change the way we see other people. And what does it look like from the perspective of a person who is all the time connected with the justice system?

„I guess my view on other people changed in the meaning that now some human behaviours have become more explainable and understandable to me, but on the other hand, I have less or no tolerance for drink-driving, hurting children or vandalism. I'm trying to listen to everyone with the same attention and understanding, regardless of the number of years of working as a judge.”



There are a lot of professions which we call prestigious. I asked Mr Gonet if he thought that his job was such a one.

„Nowadays the thinking that a judge is an authority, in my opinion, can't exist. I don't think a judge is a greater authority than a doctor or a lawyer but undoubtedly, he or she decides people's fates to a larger extent. I'm pretty sure a judge should be a law-abiding model, have an immaculate character, be impartial and make fair judgements.“



A judge as a man who knows law perfectly, in my opinion, must be all the time asked for advice in different issues. I asked him about it and he answered with a smile:



„Sometimes my friends or their friends ask me for some advice in different things. I never refuse and always try to help them in the best way I can. Also policemen and other accusers, for example from the tax office or the Customs ask me for useful tips in their cases.”

Another question was: Do you notice any differences in the way your friends treat you and people who know you only as a judge? Can you see any barriers in their behavior? I had a feeling that Mr Gonet was a little surprised. He said he had never thought about it before.

„Sometimes I really can feel distance from some people, especially when they find out what my job is. But my friends don't feel embarrassed when I'm with them. A judge is a person like any other, having his own passions, interests and a private life.”

Definitely, there isn't a perfect job. There isn't also a job which has no advantages. In Mr Gonet's opinion, his job isn't all the time nice and pleasant.

„For me the main disadvantage is big psychological stress related to the case, imagining what could happen if somebody from my family was in such a situation. It's also very difficult to watch the children's harm, their hard lives.

The great advantage of my job is independence, I'm not subordinate to anybody, I can make judgements according to the dictates of my conscience. Besides, I can arrange my working time on my own.”



My final question was: Do you have any problems with solving complicated and ambiguous cases during trials? Do you think in such situations special skills are necessary to handle them?

„Of course, different problems appear in the courtroom. The ones which are related to applying articles and rules, one can settle by looking at specialist literature, judicature. However, the biggest problems are the ones connected with judging human behavior.”



He also said:

„A judge has to be a very good lawyer, but also needs to have a lot of psychological knowledge. In my view, a good judge has to know how to cooperate with other people, be respectful to them, but also immediately react to wrong behaviour. If you want to be a good judge, you should be quick at making decisions, have a mind of your own and be able to defend it, not to be submissive to any pushing, and above all, be fair.”

At the end of the interview Mr Gonet said some beautiful words summing up his job and expressing his attitude to it:

„The job of a judge means a huge responsibility and respect for parties, but it's also a pleasure. You can't do this job because you have to, without an inner conviction, without a vocation. And these are the reasons why it's a passion for me. And, by the way, I can't imagine myself doing another job with such a pleasure.”



Interviewer: Karolina Olszyńska