



## Committee on Professional Ethics

Opinion #345 - 5/30/74 (24-74) Topic: Law office open house

Digest: The propriety of a law office open house depends upon its apparent motivation.

Code: Canon 9  
EC 2-9; 2-10  
DR 2-101(B); 2-102(A)

### QUESTION

May a law office invite clients, relatives, friends and public officials, to attend an open house celebrating the opening of a new office?

### OPINION

A lawyer may and properly should take pride in the appearance of his office, its furnishings, its library and its office equipment. Clients and friends may well enjoy seeing a lawyer's new office and appreciate an invitation to do so. Such an invitation on a casual basis would not offend the obligation of a lawyer not to publicize himself or his partners. However, a department store type of open house with the attendance of the Mayor and other public officials would be offensive. The answer, therefore, as to propriety or impropriety lies somewhere between these extremes dependent in a large part upon the apparent motivation. If it appears that the purpose is to share a pleasurable experience with relatives, personal friends, attorneys and clients, it would be proper. If, however, the apparent motivation is to publicize the firm or solicit clients, the open house will be improper.

The following excerpt from ABA Inf. 623 (1963) provides appropriate guidelines. The opinion dealt with proposed open house receptions at the opening of new offices and following the redecoration and refurnishing of old offices, to which lawyers, public officials and prominent business men would be invited.

"While in many cases the invitation to an open house extended to 'public officials and prominent business men' is doubtless prompted simply by the natural pride of the attorneys in the appearance and furnishings of the office, nevertheless, the necessary effect of any such open house or invitation to it, in the opinion of the Committee, constitutes advertising prohibited by [former] Canon 27.

"It is not improper for attorneys to entertain their clients and other attorneys in their offices or elsewhere, but judgment should be relied upon to keep such entertainment within proper limits."

**NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION  
Professional Ethics Committee Opinion**

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While this opinion was prepared under the former Canons, the standards of the Code are substantially similar. Canon 9; DR 2-102(A). See also, DR 2-101(B); EC 2-9; EC 2-10.

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