

Network News

Get to Know



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How do you describe your practice?

My practice is mostly construction and insurance coverage for larger policyholders, as well as some commercial litigation, government investigations, and white collar criminal defense. To give you a sense of the variety of my practice, one month last Fall, I had a trial for one of our firm's corporate clients, later that month tried a criminal case, and at the same time was working on insurance claims for three construction industry policyholders on two of the larger airport reconstruction projects and an NFL stadium.

I built my practice based on a combination of my interests and the issues people called me to handle. I didn't go into law thinking, "I'm going to review insurance policies and try to create the best solutions for clients," but clients needed that advice, so I kept focusing on it.

What's your approach to client service, and how does it set you apart?

I am hyper-responsive. I am constantly sending notes to clients, and I'm on the phone all day. I think being very responsive is helpful to clients.

Over the years, I've also become brutally honest in assessing cases and claims. That has come over time as I've become more confident in my skill set and areas of law.

I also think of relationships as long-term investments. I don't just want to make a quick buck and get one outcome. I want every client to rely on me for many years to come.

What are the biggest issues facing your clients?

I hear a lot of clients talking about what they expect to be a recession in the United States this year. Labor shortages and labor issues are also common across industries. And, there are still the looming effects of the pandemic – it changed many things in society, remote work, people wanting to leave to do other jobs, and so on.

Are there particular legal issues you're monitoring or that you see heating up?

I closely follow new services on insurance, construction, and investigations. I'm litigating cases in some developing areas of law, so I am learning which theories are proving successful across the country.

How would you describe your ideal client?

It can't be based on size, because I work for some of the largest companies and also for companies having their first major claim where they need a lawyer. Instead, I think it's personal relationships – people who can count on me as an advisor, and we build trust and our relationship over the years, and ultimately become personal friends.

What in your life and professional experience has shaped your perspective?

In terms of my professional experience, being an Assistant U.S. Attorney in Atlanta changed everything. It gave me the chance to be in court all the time, run all my own cases, get a feel for who I am in front of people, and significant experience in public speaking and making persuasive arguments.

Personally, I'm a first generation American; my mom was born in Germany, and my dad was born in Russia. Being a kid of immigrants definitely shapes you. There's pressure to work hard, and you're naturally afraid of failure. You're always trying to fit in, and you have to make your own way into everything.

What made you decide to become a lawyer?

I was a political science major, and Chicago was a great place to grow up with an interest in politics. I wanted to be a politician. I went to Georgetown Law thinking I'd work in law or politics for a year and then run for Congress. Then I became a lawyer and tried some political fundraising and realized that wasn't my thing.

Tell us about your experience working with Steve Schleicher on the Derek Chauvin prosecution.

My partner, Steve, was hired as co-lead prosecutor for the Chauvin case. There was this urgent need to bring on the best people for the task, and Steve and Jerry Blackwell, who was the other co-lead prosecutor, certainly were the best and reached a great result.

He turned to me, as a former federal prosecutor, and our partner, Stephanie Laws, to help him coordinate the use-of-force part of the case. We worked with our prosecution expert witnesses and did the preparation for cross-examination of the defendant's use-of-force witnesses.

There were a couple different attributes that made it a great experience. First, it was an incredible, historic opportunity to work on the case at all. Steve and the trial team faced the incredible pressure of being in court in front of millions of people. Leading up to the verdict – that last month of trial – was just an amazing experience. And my goodness, that team. The folks who put everything together, from the trial team to everyone involved in it, were an incredible group.

You're deeply involved in the firm's leadership and a number of organizations. What motivates you to be involved?

Two things motivate me. One, in any organization you care about, you want to know what's going on and have your pulse on the important happenings. And two, I've always wanted to give back to organizations I felt gave me a chance to succeed. In my professional life, that's my law firm, The Trial Network, and the ABA. I've always wanted to do my best to contribute to these organizations, not only knowing that good things would come back to me as a result, but also because I've always been drawn to adding to those organizations.

What do you consider Maslon's key differentiators? How do you distinguish the firm from its competitors?

I think we're the best midsize firm in Minnesota because we have a sophisticated, national practice for high-level clients but don't charge the same high rates as large, national firms. We've had consultants give our firm advice, and they usually say two things: you really seem to like each other and work well as a group, and you could charge more for what you do.

Over the last 10 years in Minneapolis, nearly every other sophisticated midsize firm has been gobbled up by a national firm. We're one of the last midsize firms standing, trying to maintain the culture we've had for a long time.

What are the big issues you're seeing in the workforce?

The remote nature of much of our practice causes two different issues. One, it makes it more difficult for people to feel like they're connected because we don't see each other as much in person; we have to be more intentional about creating strong relationships with people in different ways than we did before. And two, we've had a couple of younger associates leave and go to large, national firms based in cities like New York and Chicago, where firms pay more, while continuing to live in Minnesota. It's definitely more challenging to recruit and retain the best talent and keep them engaged in a remote environment.

We've tried to have more in-person events, from breakfast on Wednesdays to happy hours to having more

organizational department meetings. We're being intentional about meeting once a month, going out for drinks once or twice a month, and we carve out time to get together. People are not just organically getting together like they did before. Everything is different.

Tell me about your experience with The Trial Network. How did you get involved, and what keeps you involved?

It started with my partner, David Schultz (now Magistrate Judge for the District of Minnesota), who was the incoming Chair of the Network. He started bringing me to meetings seven years ago. I've been to every single Network resort program since then and have presented at or co-chaired most of them. I've tried to do whatever I can to be in front of people in the organization, and it's worked.

Why do I keep going back? I enjoy the events and the people. The business part is certainly important, but maybe not as important as the relationships I've built with like-minded people in this great organization. I've met people who are the "me" in their organizations – like Thompson Hine's Tony Rospert – who are focused on business development but really focused on building relationships with people who are somewhat obsessed with the business of law. We talk about fun and funny things, but it always devolves into some nerdy conversation about how to run the best law practice.

And since Felice became the Executive Director of the Network, I've seen an evolution. There's more diversity in the Network, and the programming is top-notch. There's a solid group of dedicated people who want to make each event valuable, not just for themselves, but for the rest of the group.

What advice would you give someone attending their first few Trial Network events?

First, you have to put yourself out there. It is a natural instinct for people their first couple of times to hang out with people they already know – people from their law firm and the clients their law firm brings – but if you really want to get more out of the Network, you have to meet people, and introduce your clients to other Network members, and then eventually refer cases to other Network members. Also, contribute to the organization from the beginning. Think about how you're going to get on stage and present, how you can bring the best clients, and how you can make the organization better. Do that, and you'll get the most benefit from it.