

Checking In

Practical Law Advisory Board Members Discuss Their Current Work and Key Legal Developments in Their Practice Area

Education: 1998: J.D., *cum laude*, Indiana University Maurer School of Law; 1995: M.S., Georgetown University; 1993: B.A., *magna cum laude*, Indiana University Bloomington.

Career in Brief: 2018–present: Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP, Partner; 2013–2018: Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP, Counsel; 2005–2013: Latham & Watkins LLP (2011–2013: Counsel; 2005–2011: Associate); 2000–2005: Winston & Strawn LLP, Associate; 1998–2000: Baker McKenzie LLP, Associate.

What do you think is currently the biggest challenge facing finance attorneys? Our clients rely on us to have our fingers on the pulse of the market (with respect to both legal trends and business and financial developments) at all times, which is increasingly challenging as the pace of transactions continues to speed up. As a result, it is more important than ever to leverage technology to create databases and other tools that can be used to quickly and easily track specific issues. Of course, technology presents its own issues for attorneys, from confidentiality concerns to concerns about the accuracy and scope of the data being used.

Are there any recent legal or market developments that you think could significantly affect finance practice?

The growth of direct lending in the middle market shows no signs of abating. Private equity sponsors are finding that they can get committed financing and close transactions much more smoothly (and often more quickly) by going to a direct lender who can commit to all or most of a credit facility. This avoids the complexity and cost involved in traditional syndicated bank finance.

How has the COVID-19 crisis impacted finance practice? M&A deal volume (and, therefore, acquisition financing

deal volume) has decreased notably. However, despite the decrease in origination of new deals, there is, not surprisingly, a lot of amendment and waiver activity as borrowers seek to take advantage of the Paycheck Protection Program and Main Street Lending Program, or otherwise discover they need covenant relief, additional working capital, or other adjustments. The COVID-19 crisis is likely to continue for some time, and so it is reasonable to expect that many borrowers eventually will need bankruptcy protection or consensual restructuring with lenders, which will keep finance attorneys busy.

In an increasingly competitive legal market, what strategies do you employ to generate business and retain clients? First and foremost, I focus on high-quality, highly responsive service. Clients expect a lot, and if you deliver great work and are always available to them, you will quickly build a relationship that will endure as those clients rise in their organizations or move on to new opportunities. At the end of the day, clients almost always choose their attorneys based on a solid relationship.

If not an attorney, what would you wish to be? I am not sure anyone would pay me to do this, but if I were not an attorney, I would dedicate myself to learning as many languages as possible. Early on, I found a passion for language and have since become fluent in Spanish, Italian, Catalan, Portuguese, and French. I have also made real headway outside of the Romance languages, having achieved a high degree of proficiency in Dutch, German, and Swedish, and I am developing abilities in Russian, Greek, and Finnish.

What is your favorite book? *A Prayer for Owen Meany* by John Irving is hands down my favorite book. It speaks to



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so many fundamental elements of the human condition, and John Irving has a talent for the absurd and outlandish that sets his work apart.

What was your first job? The summer I turned 15, I was a busboy at the local country club in my hometown of Michigan City, Indiana. I had been admitted to Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, on scholarship, but I needed to earn money that I could live on while at school. I often worked 50 or 60 hours a week (and almost 80 the week of the annual club golf tournament), but without that job, life at boarding school would have been much, much harder.

What is the best career advice you have ever received? Keep pushing your supervisors out of the way. As a mild-mannered Midwesterner, it was not necessarily in my character to challenge my superiors, but in the legal field this is how you gain experience and grow. It also effectively shows your supervisors that you care about the matters on which you are working. It took me some time to understand how important this advice was.

What one piece of advice would you give to a junior attorney considering specializing in finance? Do not worry if you lack accounting or finance experience. Many (if not most) finance attorneys get their first exposure to the “finance” portion of the practice on the job. **PL**