
The Interview

by Joshua Stein, Joshua Stein PLLC, New York, NY

As I walked westward on 55th Street from Third Avenue in late 2010, soon after I had started my new law practice, I heard someone call my name. I looked to my right, down the ramp into a parking garage. I saw a woman who looked familiar walking out of the garage. I couldn't place her until she reminded me: "I'm Debbie Goldman. We were at Latham together."

We had both worked at Latham & Watkins in the late nineties. Richard Chadakoff and Jamie Hisiger, two of my partners at Latham, had enlisted Debbie to work with us as a temporary attorney while she pursued a Columbia MBA. They knew Debbie from their previous firm. I had seen or heard Debbie's name occasionally in the years since she worked at Latham. I sometimes wondered what she had done after business school.

So I asked: "What are you doing?" "Just this minute?" "Sure." She said she had driven into the city for an appointment with a legal headhunter, and she was walking to that appointment.

"Are you looking for a job?" I asked. The answer, obviously, was yes. We walked westward together, crossing Lexington.

Debbie had seen in the press that I had started my own law practice, limited to commercial real estate law, which was her practice area too. She had put off calling to congratulate me because she didn't think I'd remember who she was.

I did remember. Even though Debbie and I had never worked together on a transaction, Richard and Jamie had always described her as a good lawyer. I also remembered from our interactions at Latham that Debbie was a nice person, which was of equal or greater importance to me.

I asked Debbie if she'd like to forget about the headhunter and work with me. I wasn't ready to hire a

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full-time associate, but I wanted to hire an experienced lawyer to help part time as needed. Debbie could work in the office or at home or, subject to confidentiality concerns, anywhere else, because my entire law practice is online.

That turned out to be perfect for Debbie, given her family responsibilities and other things going on in her life, including managing real estate investments for herself and her family. By the time we reached Park Avenue, we had finished Debbie's interview. We agreed she would start work the next day as one of my first employees. She still works with me on the same basis we negotiated during our walk on 55th Street, and her terms of employment still include frequent visits to the office by Debbie's dog, Yaffa.

This small story teaches a few larger lessons, which I suppose some people may find obvious.

First, it's amazing what can happen if you get out of your house or apartment, and away from your computer screen. The city is full of people and an endless stream of random interactions. You never know who you will meet or what luck you'll find. That's one of many reasons the Internet and social media won't replace central business districts and in-person interactions.

Second, it pays to be nice. I had no experience with Debbie's legal work, beyond the good things Richard and Jamie had said, but I remembered I enjoyed my conversations with Debbie at Latham. Even though she had no long-term plans there, she was friendly with everyone. She didn't need to be, but fifteen years later it landed her a job.

Third, don't necessarily limit yourself to full-time candidates and the obvious hiring process. You can do quite well with people who aren't on the usual track but have great experience and people skills and can work part time for the benefit of all concerned.

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Fourth, by embracing technology, you can make it easier to attract people like Debbie and integrate them into your organization. Using the state-of-the-art technology I've adopted for my practice, Debbie and I together closed one of the largest New York City real estate sales of 2012, a 50.1% interest in the St. Johns Center at 340 West Street, while she visited her parents in Florida and I visited mine in California. (Though Debbie and I did most of the work, we also had some help from other members of my team who stayed in town.)

Fifth, Debbie and I made one mistake: we did a lousy job of staying in touch with each other in the years after she left Latham. We should have done better.

We got lucky. ■

Vancouver!

October 24-27, 2013

Mark your calendars! Please join us for an enlightening and lively series of sessions at the Fall Meeting of the College in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada on October 24-27, 2013. Entitled "Emerging Trends from a Dynamic Market: The Times They Are a-Changing," the nine hours of programs, coupled with numerous committee meetings, will provide Fellows with the opportunity to stay up-to-date on a wide array of topics affecting the practice of law in real estate. Just as importantly, it will provide the opportunity for collegial interaction.

We start on Thursday afternoon with the latest chapter of "The Big Deal." This time we learn about Target Corporation's acquisition of a portfolio of 175+ stores in Canada and what was involved in pulling together a massive acquisition project. Friday sessions include an introduction to how the Dodd-Frank Act will affect commercial real estate, a review of evolving demographics and market conditions in the United States, and discussions on health care financing, enterprise risk management and insurance clauses that actually work.

On Saturday, we will hear about trends in the restructuring of real estate joint ventures, will explore the use of agricultural land prior to its development, and have our annual business meeting. Roundtables will include those that cover in greater depth the topics raised in certain plenary sessions. In addition, standalone roundtables will include such topics as where the practice of law is headed, co-lending agreements, ILSA, data center leasing and hot issues in purchase agreements.

Look in your inbox shortly for announcements about registration.

Larry Bensignor, Meeting Leader