

CAREER SPOTLIGHT: BRIAN LAWRENCE

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Please briefly explain your career path and what led you to your current position.

I am an associate principal counsel in the Walt Disney World legal department. My career path is a unique one. I didn't enroll in law school with the goal of working for Disney, or even working in-house. When I applied to law school, I had no idea what practice areas would interest me. Nor did I appreciate all the career opportunities available to me at the time.

I'm from South Florida, but I was always open to moving to another city post-law school. Orlando always appealed to me, largely due to the nostalgia I had for going to theme parks growing up. I ended up summering at Lowndes in Orlando, Florida during my 2L summer. Luckily enough, the firm extended an offer to me to start as a full-time associate in the fall of 2016 in their litigation department. There, I practiced commercial litigation for roughly six years. Primarily, I handled business, trade secret, employment, and construction disputes, as well as cybersecurity matters. I loved litigating. Still, I didn't know what I wanted to do long-term. At times, I was fairly certain I wanted to be a law firm partner. Other times, I wasn't so sure.

At a crossroads in my career, I decided to try out a larger law firm. I accepted an offer with Baker Hostetler in Orlando, but, due to a client conflict issue, I was unable to start for a few months. The conflict was finally resolved, and, as it happened, a Disney recruiter reached out to me to inquire whether I'd be interested in an in-house position with the company. I was certainly excited, but there was one big problem—the timing was terrible! I was less than 24 hours away from giving notice and starting at another law firm.

While on the phone with my mom, I mentioned that a Disney recruiter reached out to me, but that it wasn't the best time to pursue another opportunity. Knowing how much of a Disney fanatic I am, she *sternly* encouraged me to go for it. I took her advice. "Mother knows best," after all.

I gave notice to Lowndes, which was hard. I'd spent six years there and got awesome opportunities that a lot of lawyers at my experience level simply hadn't, so I was grateful. I started at Baker a few weeks later. However, I was interviewing for Disney at the time. I felt awkward about

that, to say the least, but I thought that it was a long shot that I'd get the role anyway. After four months, I ended up getting the position!

What I like most about being in-house is that everyone is working to accomplish the same goal, unlike litigation, which is adversarial by definition. I also take pride in the matters I get to work on because I've always had such an emotional connection to the brand.

2. What is something that has changed since you began working in the entertainment industry, and how has that change impacted your current job in the industry?

The biggest changes to the legal profession generally have been those necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The profession had to adapt to this new environment—quickly. Prior to the pandemic, I remember traveling hours to and from five-minute uncontested hearings and short client meetings and billing for every minute of that. That was the norm then. During the height of the pandemic, meetings, depositions, and hearings were conducted virtually. Early on, everyone realized that utilizing virtual communication was far more efficient than the pre-pandemic ways. Three hours previously spent going to and from a courthouse for an *ex parte* hearing is now 30 minutes on a virtual meeting, which frees up time to work on other matters.

Additionally, lawyers have embraced—and often even prefer—working from home. The difficulty with this is that it can be difficult to maintain an office culture in a purely virtual environment. So now, companies are working to strike the right balance between flexibility and maintaining office culture.

Almost three years later, it's evident the pandemic-induced changes to the legal profession are here to stay. In my view, these changes are for the better.

3. What was your first “win” that made you confident that you belonged in your job or the industry overall?

For me, the result is not as important as the process. In other words, wins have been less important to my career than growth. To be sure, winning my first hearing was certainly confidence-boosting, but that is a temporary feeling. To grow in confidence, you have to be comfortable making mistakes. Most mistakes are fixable, even if it doesn't seem that way in the moment. Own your mistakes, fix them, and learn from them. You'll gain more confidence through learning from failure than you will through individual “wins.”

4. What key issues in the entertainment industry are especially relevant right now, and what do you see becoming more prevalent in the next 5–10 years?

The intersection of technology and law is particularly fascinating. For one, reconciling emerging technologies and issues (e.g., data privacy and cybersecurity) with common law concepts or longstanding statutory schemes can be challenging. Also, these emerging issues have given rise to new laws. There is a plethora of consumer protection, privacy and data protection laws that simply did not exist ten years ago. Even more legislation is being drafted every day. Simply put, digital technology affects all industries, and lawyers need to keep abreast of these changes.

5. What is the biggest risk that you’ve taken in your career? How has that risk helped you in your career or what lessons did you learn from it?

Your career is a series of risks! Going to law school, taking the bar exam, and accepting your first job—to name a few. But, as a young lawyer, the biggest (but most important) risk you can take is to take more ownership over the matters you work on. That is, don’t simply create a deposition outline for the partner you work for; ask to *take* the deposition. After you draft an awesome motion, ask if you can argue it. You may get a “no” the first time, or the first few times, but this shows confidence and ownership. Early on in my career, I could have done a better job of “owning” matters. For example, I would complete a research assignment, but would not follow up to see how the research was used or if there was anything else on the case that I could assist with. Piecemeal assignments simply won’t develop your skills as a lawyer like handling whole matters will. Seek out more responsibility from those you work for. You’ll build trust this way.

6. What is one of the biggest misconceptions in your industry?

I think some view in-house roles as cushy, stress-free 9-5 gigs. That couldn’t be further from the truth. I certainly work less than I did while working for a law firm, but you’ll have to work hard in any job you have. The legal profession is a stressful one, irrespective of whether you’re working in-house, at a law firm, or for the government.

7. What is one piece of advice that you would give to students trying to break into the entertainment industry?

I think the biggest mistake a law student can make is to set overly rigid career goals for themselves, particularly when seeking in-house opportunities. It's a misconception to think "If I work for X big law firm A for a set number of years, then I will work for company B." There are several problems with this line of thinking, not the least of which is that you'll likely foreclose other amazing opportunities that may arise. Certainly, you should always set goals for yourself, but you never know where your career will take you. I went into law school with an open mind as to where I wanted to be down the road, and I'm glad I did. Find a practice area and a job that you love, but always be open to stepping outside your comfort zone to try something new.