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ON THE RISE



PARTNER

Christopher L. Dodson

Experience:

Bracewell, 2005-present

Education:

University of Texas School of Law, 2005
Southern Methodist University, 2002

What drew you to a career in law?

I think even as far back as grade school I've been drawn to being a trial lawyer. I've always wanted to be involved with solving people's problems in a way that was beneficial to them. I've always had that client-advocate mentality. I've also been comfortable public speaking and trying to be a good leader and role model, which are key qualities to possess in being a good trial lawyer.

Have you set a specific goal that you want to achieve in the next year?

I try not to look at goals as a short-term outcome. My goals have always been those that continue year-after-year. You may have a case that you want to win, which is an example of a short-term goal, but I try to look at it from a long-term perspective. How can I carry this success over into the next trial? What did I do well, what can I improve to build on that accomplishment? I believe this keeps you at your very best for all clients, continuously looking to be better.

What has been your proudest career moment?

My proudest career moment was making partner at Bracewell, the firm where I summered, and now serve as co-Hiring Partner. In this day-in-age, it is increasing rare for attorneys to be "lifers" at their law firm. But I'm proud to be just that. Our firm has excellent, interesting attorneys doing sophisticated, cutting-edge legal work every day – but we also have a unique, people-focused culture. Bracewell's unique culture was one of the primary reasons I chose Bracewell out of law school, and I am proud to say that same culture is still alive-and-well. I'm now very proud to serve as our Hiring Partner, entrusted by my partners to foster and protect that culture going forward.

Where do you fit on a 1-10 work-life balance scale with 10 being nirvana? Please explain.

I would say an 8, which is pretty good for this line of work. Obviously, private practice and trial work is time consuming. We serve at the liking of our clients and we're available 24/7, 365, and I take great pride in being available to my clients and working hard for them. At the same time, it is important to me to be a good, attentive husband and actively involved in my kids' lives. I have an awesome wife and two amazing young children. I make sure to carve out time to coach baseball, attend performances and help with school work. That often makes for late nights, but I insist on making time for that. I am lucky to work at a firm that understands and embraces those priorities, and encourages lawyers to have good life balance outside the office. And not only family obligations, but anything our lawyers are passionate about outside the office, the firm encourages and embraces us to be involved. I share our firm's view that a healthy work-life balance makes us, collectively, a better law firm.

What is the top quality that you've used to succeed in the profession?

Zealous advocacy for my clients. A true interest and care that they succeed. We are an extension of our clients, so I care as much about their goals as they do. Other important qualities are mutual respect

with other lawyers – both colleagues and our adversaries. Intuition and the ability to relate to people – clients, judges, juries, opposing counsel and colleagues – is very important.

Who is your favorite mentor and why?

My most influential mentor is my older brother, Scott. He was a summer associate and then junior associate at big firms in Houston and helped me to understand the legal community here in Houston coming out of law school. He was actually the first person to point me in the direction of Bracewell as a good fit. He later moved to work at a litigation firm in DC, and ultimately entered academia where he became a tenured law professor. He continues to inspire me to look at the law from a different perspective. He is also a great person to run legal arguments by, as he's very theoretical.

What's the best advice anyone has ever given you?

You can never be too prepared.

What trends are you observing in the profession that you're excited about?

I continue to be excited and optimistic about new market participants in Houston. It challenges us to be the best that we can be and it's great to work in one of the best legal markets in the world.

Many of the best, most experienced trial lawyers in the world are right here in Houston. We are fortunate to work amongst legendary, trailblazing trial lawyers in Houston. But, I'm really excited about the next generation of trial lawyers here in Houston. We have fantastic litigators from both the defense and plaintiffs' bar here in Houston and I'd put the Houston litigators up against anyone in the world.

What is the greatest challenge you see for the legal profession?

Many commercial disputes are legally and factually complicated. Those complicated matters deserve sufficient time to work-up. But some commercial cases are relatively straight-forward. Those cases need a more efficient avenue to trial. If both parties are ready, the parties should not have to wait 2-3 years to get to a jury trial, and then another year after that to have an appeal heard. Clients need certainty and confidence that their problems can get resolved quickly in the courts. ■