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The Four Questions:

Why Is This Coverage Lawyer Different From All Other Coverage Lawyers?



Ron Schiller: From Behemoth To Boutique

Hangley Aronchick Segal Pudlin & Schiller is one of the finest law firms in Philadelphia and beyond. Ron Schiller is one of the best coverage lawyers in America. So it doesn't raise any eyebrows that Ron is a named partner, and Vice Chair, of the Hangley firm. But here's where it gets unusual. Prior to joining the then 40 lawyer Hangley firm in 2009, Ron spent eighteen years at DLA Piper. DLA, and its 4,000 lawyers, was then the world's largest law firm. [The are ten states that don't even have 4,000 lawyers in the entire state.]

Lawyers moving from small firms to bigger ones is the age-old story – looking for the proverbial larger platform. But in Ron's case it was the opposite. And size wasn't the only difference between DLA and Hangley. Everyone knows DLA. Hangley, while an elite firm, is not a household name. In a legal climate where some see bigger and brand name as better, Ron's unorthodox move seems risky. But Ron, and his seven lawyer team, made the jump. Ron was kind enough to answer some questions here about going from a behemoth law firm to a boutique.



Ronald P. Schiller

Ron Schiller is a 1984 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, where he was an Editor of the Law Review. Ron has a broadly diversified jury trial and appellate practice, with a strong emphasis in insurance coverage and extra-contractual claim trials, arbitrations and appeals. Ron and his teams have averaged two to four trials a year in venues across the country for over a decade. Ron has also argued several appeals a year in state and federal courts on coverage, extra-contractual and business litigation matters. A substantial part of Ron's practice includes representing insurers and reinsurers against healthcare and managed care companies in E&O, D&O, reinsurance and ERISA coverage disputes. These cases include disputes in the billions of dollars.

The respected English publisher Chambers & Partners recognized Ron in Chambers USA: America's Leading Lawyers for Business, noting that clients admire him as "someone who consistently wins big cases."

[Ed. Note – I read a lot of coverage cases. Take my word, Ron Schiller has a national practice involving cases with fortunes at stake and significant complexity and they often make law. rjm]

What were some of the reasons for your switch from DLA Piper to Hangley?

There were four principal reasons. First, the legal and financial world was changing, and sometimes turbulent times are good times to offer clients a new option. I found clients and my colleagues who made the move especially receptive – for which I remain very grateful. Clients may also have appreciated a break from the higher big firm rate I was then approaching – just a hunch. Second, on a spin of the old real estate mantra, “conflicts, conflicts and conflicts.” When your practice is based on opposing Fortune 100 companies and substantial mid-cap companies for large insurers and reinsurers in adversarial proceedings, 4,000 lawyers in 80-plus offices may be less-than-ideal. I have a group of terrific partners and associates very loyal to the clients (and me), and maintaining that growing practice required a platform without so many conflicts. Third, the timing was right. I had spent nearly 18 years at the world’s then-largest law firm, headed a strong, growing practice, was well-positioned but was also still in my 40s and ready for a move. Finally, I loved the idea of joining an elite, high-end litigation firm of under 100 lawyers with people I’d known and respected since law school.

Can you compare the differences between practicing at DLA and Hangley?

The easiest way to answer this is to state what has not changed. I continue to work with some 30 lawyers in the insurance litigation and counseling arena here just like I did at DLA. Even the biggest of cases get handled essentially the same way at Hangley as at DLA. This is no doubt a function of technology, the professionals, the way litigation works today, and the way we do things. Against this reality, the only differences I notice on a regular basis are, first, at some 60 lawyers I actually know everyone here, and I regularly and productively interact with most of my colleagues. Second, Hangley has an important reputation in the region, and it is definitely known by the local business community and judiciary in ways different than national or international firms. Sometimes that can be a benefit just as important as a national reputation.

Hangley is one of the finest firms in Philadelphia and beyond. But no doubt many of your clients were not familiar with it. Between that, and its much smaller size, was there any client reluctance to it?

Surprisingly – at least to me, having grown up at a large firm – there was no client reluctance to working with us at Hangley. I think I do benefit from having joined a well-regarded, terrific firm. There is no question that clients looked us up and continue to investigate us – to good effect so far. Some clients needed to be educated on the new firm, while others educated themselves or gave us a shot here.

What do you see as the chief benefit of having joined the Hangley firm?

In a constantly adjusting legal market, we were positioned well to adjust with clients. Two months after we moved here, a major client sold a part of its business, while, nearly simultaneously, another client changed its litigation strategy entirely, making what we do (temporarily, at least) less important. Yet excellent insurers and reinsurers stuck with us, and new clients gave us a chance. Some of these insurers either didn’t exist 20 years ago or were in different lines of business entirely. I think the move here allowed us to be considered by these clients, to change with them, to develop or grow these relationships, and to remain relevant. Given that most of our terrific insurance litigators are in their 30s and 40s, this is really critical to our long-term success. And we are grateful.