

# Long Island Business NEWS

## When It Comes To Management, It's Whatever Works, Baby

By Claude Solnik

### *Partners, teams . . . it's different strokes for different law firms*

It's a conundrum faced by managing partners at nearly every law firm: how to divide time between practicing law and managing the firm.

Should they be writing that motion or working on that sticky personnel matter? The big deposition is tomorrow, but the move to the new office is next week . . . so how do law firm leaders balance these demands?

Ruskin, Moscou Faltischek in Uniondale found a way: co-managing partners.

"We're doing a tremendous amount of work as lawyers," said Douglas Cooper, who manages along with Mark Mulholland. "But we are able to deal with the issues in the law firm.

"Historically, the people who have acted as managing partners in this law firm have been tremendous, terrific lawyers," Cooper added. "We wouldn't want our clients to lose access to that skill."

Mulholland said the two-headed arrangement lets the lawyers more easily maintain their own bottom line in terms of billable hours, without causing the managers to short shrift their other duties.

Partners and associates at various law firms agree there is a fundamental necessity for managing partners to balance lawyering and leadership. The "functions of a managing partner," therefore, are thus, according to Managing Partner Mark Sussman of Jackson Lewis' Melville office: "Be the manager of the business. Be a functioning lawyer. And try to bring in some business to keep people busy."

Michael Kaufman, who in May became managing partner at Woodbury-based Kaufman Dolowich Schneider Bianco &

Voluck, said his new role means more work and longer days.

"We've gotten bigger, so I take more of a managerial role," said Kaufman, who works 10- to 12-hour days. "I'm also dealing with a lot of cases. The amount of hours in the day has expanded."

Rivkin Radler Managing Partner Bill Savino said he views the role as a mandate to help lead - while listening to other partners.

"I've always been curious about why they call it 'managing partner,'" Savino said. "You manage paper. You lead people. In a partnership where everyone has an interest, I try my best to lead by gaining some consensus among the partners."

Not every firm has a managing partner at the helm. At Garfunkel, Wild & Travis in Great Neck, Robert Wild is chairman, and "people know who's in charge," he said.

While co-managing partners can make some things easier, some believe it's better to have one person at the helm, whether it's a managing partner or a chairman. Too many chiefs. . .

**"I don't even know how [co-managing partners] would work," said Marc Hamroff, managing partner at Moritt Hock Hamroff & Horowitz in Garden City. "I don't understand that dynamic. It doesn't seem to make a lot of sense to me."**

Whether or not one person is the titular head of an office or firm, other lawyers typically help run the operation. At employment law firm Jackson Lewis, Sussman works closely with Paul Siegel and Matt Halpern, who with Sussman opened the Long Island office more than 15 years ago. Siegel is head of litigation in the Melville office and group practice leader of the wage and hour practice of the entire firm; Halpern leads the firm's affirmative action practice.

"We are a pretty effective team," Sussman said. "We didn't get too hung up on the titles. The significance of the managing partner title was 'the buck stops with me.' We would do things together. We would make decisions jointly."

**"I don't make decisions on my own," Hamroff said. "We don't view a managing partner's role as to make large, substantial decisions, but really to help direct the firm."**

At some law firms, committees make recommendations - sometimes even decisions - on various issues, while partners vote on others. In this way, law firms are among the best examples of corporate democracies.

"If a partnership works really well, there never is a vote," Hamroff said. "There's consensus through an open, frank discussion."

Ruskin, Moscou Faltischek boasts a three-person management committee - its co-managing partners and Managing Director P.J. Forcino, who, Cooper said, "brings business acumen to the day-to-day oversight of the firm."

Jackson Lewis, meanwhile, relies heavily on its office administrator, who handles personnel issues with support staff. "You have to know what really requires your attention and what you can delegate to someone else," Sussman said. "Managing partners can get too caught up in the day-to-day. That would not be a productive use of their time."