

## JOHN K. HUGHES

## *30th Anniversary Interview Series*

**Q: We are celebrating our 30th Anniversary, What does it mean to you? How has the journey been for you?**

**A:** It's been a great journey; I've met a lot of interesting people and have had numerous interesting legal cases here at the firm. It's very different than a larger firm setting. We've managed to stay outside the confines of Big Law and it's been a good experience to keep practicing in a smaller environment. We are able to be more client-centric and focused on the clients' welfare. Like any journey, we have had bumps in the road, but that we managed to survive the ups and downs, the ins and outs, and are still here 30 years later, is testimony to the people who are here, their commitments to both the firm and the clients and their enjoyment of the work environment that we've created. It's also

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striking to me because when we started out we all had apprehensions. It's scary when you start because you never know how things are going to turn out, you don't know if you are going to get clients. You don't know really what the future holds at all - it doesn't come with promises or guarantees when you start out. Though you settle down after a while you never completely give up the up the fear. You



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**Q: How do you think the practice of law has changed or evolved in the last 30 years?**

**A:** Well, it has evolved a lot. When I started things were very different because of the lack of technology. The technological influence has been tremendous in terms of how fast things can be done. Everything, especially the speed with which people interact with each other due to emails and instant messaging, is remarkably different. It's hard for today's generation to imagine, but there were no such things as fax machines or federal express. There was barely word processing. Most letters were typed on typewriters and then if you needed it delivered rapidly, you could call a courier to deliver it. You only had two ways to deliver it—courier or U.S. Mail. That's just an example of how things have changed. Everything moves so rapidly now-- it's much easier.

**Thirty years of excellence.**

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**Q: What were the challenges you faced during your journey in trying to establish the firm?**

**A:** It's always hard to create a firm. One of the biggest challenges when you start is to get business consistently. Many times you might have to take business away from firms that are already established and that's not an easy thing. The struggle always remains because you change from the up-start to the established and the newer firms after you are trying to take clients from you. It's a never ending struggle to find and keep business while at the same time managing it effectively and taking care of the clients so that they would not want to go anywhere else.

**Q: Is there anything you want to share about your fellow cofounders?**

**A:** Both Mark and Donna have great marketing abilities. Developing business is something both of them have been very good at and it's been very important to the success of the firm.

**Q: What would you be doing if you weren't practicing law?**

**A:** After college, I went to graduate school in history, so at that point I was kind of on track to become a college professor. However, I was influenced by a group of people working on a big lawsuit in Chicago on behalf of the Contract Buyers League when I was in graduate school, and switched over from graduate school to law school. I am glad to have changed my mind to become a lawyer.

**Q: What do you do when you are not practicing law?**

**A:** I don't have a lot of hobbies. I have a 4-hour commute each day and that takes a lot of my energy. So

during the weekend I like to sleep late and do all the errands I did not have time to do during the week.

**Q: What advice do you have for new practitioners?**

**A:** Well, the advice I would have for them is what my fellow co-founder George Gessler used to say, which is that "There are only two types of lawyers in private practice—those with business and those who work for them, and the only ones who have any security are those with business." That's what a young practitioner has to remember if he or she is going to be in private practice. In private practice you either have business or you must work for somebody who has it.

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**Q: Looking out over the horizon and thinking about the future of the organization...what do you hope to see unfold over the coming years?**

**A:** We have never operated according to a business plan. We have never set out with a conscious plan over a certain number of years. The important thing is that people must enjoy where they work and try to always keep in mind the best interests of the firm. It's human nature to identify the best interest of the firm as what's best for you, but to really create a successful firm you have to get past that and ask what's best for the firm as a whole. As long as people keep that question in the front of their minds and don't focus on themselves, the firm will be successful and will remain an enjoyable place to work.

*Thirty years of excellence.*