



ATTORNEY SEARCH

BRACEWELL AND PATTERSON L.L.P.'S SUCCESS STORY

Most law firms would love to be in the position that Bracewell & Patterson is in today. There is a tendency for firms to view themselves in terms of their relative position vis-à-vis others they perceive to be their competitors. Bracewell has long been a firm that sees its competitors as only the best firms in the markets it serves. Bracewell celebrated the 50th anniversary of its founding in 1995. Over the last seven years, as the boom in technology investment has come and gone, Bracewell has invested carefully and with purpose in its growth, while at the same time maintaining a firm culture that causes it to be considered one of the best workplaces among Texas firms. For a top rated firm, and in a state where good manners at some level are still required in almost every workplace, this is quite an achievement.

Demographics

Bracewell today is a firm of approximately 375 lawyers, making it the ninth largest firm in the state in terms of number of attorneys. Profits per partner at Bracewell in 2001 were \$504,000, placing the firm 14th in the state and well inside the top 100 firms nationwide in terms of this metric. Although the firm has grown by several hundred attorneys in only a few years, the growth has been methodical and not extremely speculative. For instance, some firms went through a period of dramatic hiring on all levels during 1999-2000 to compensate for a perceived or actual increase in workflow coming from the booming technology and dot-com industries. Many firms, though they professed to try to avoid the bubble being created by technology work, grew their Austin offices at the epicenter of the dot com bubble in Texas most dramatically. A number of these firms, including some Texas based firms, became overstaffed as the economy turned downward and as their dot-com clients stumbled and fell.

In contrast to the cutbacks and disappointments at some other firms of similar size, Bracewell has continued to be strong. Even the collapse of Enron, one of Bracewell's largest clients until Bracewell ceased work for Enron after its bankruptcy filing, only managed to have a temporary negative effect on the revenue of the firm. In only a few short months, Bracewell has surpassed its revenue levels from the Enron days and continues to grow. Bracewell & Patterson is an international law firm with roots firmly in Texas. The firm has offices in Austin, Corpus Christi, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio, Texas, as well as in Reston, Virginia, Washington, D.C., London, England, and Almaty and Astana, Kazakhstan. Bracewell's profile is not unusual for a Texas firm of its stature, other than that it maintains offices in a former Soviet Republic. The firm's offices in Kazakhstan, which are profitable, are a sign of Bracewell's willingness to enter into new ventures where they make sense.

Acquisitions and Changes

In the third quarter of 1999, Bracewell acquired approximately 65 lawyers from Wells Pinckney & McHugh, a San Antonio-based firm, which instantly created a successful San Antonio and Corpus Christi practice for Bracewell. Many new clients, including a major Texas-based airline, and focused expertise in Labor and Employment practice,

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were added as a result of the merger. Selective partner acquisitions, such as the recruitment of Dallas partner Michael Tankersley in 1999 and of the patent attorney at Felsman Bradley in Austin, have made Bracewell a much more significant presence in many of the markets it serves. Even though Bracewell did not grow irrationally as a result of the dot-com boom, the firm did refocus some of its efforts, and with success. Having conducted numerous private placement transactions for established clients in Houston and Dallas in the technology space, including the formation of the nation's first on-line bank, Bracewell made internal changes to pool the knowledge that was collected within various sectors of the firm into an Internet, Telecommunications, and E-Commerce (ITEC) practice group. Drawing on the resources found among the firm's financial services, corporate, and regulatory specialties, Bracewell's ITEC practice group became an immediate benefit to clients. Standing alone, any one of these moves might be termed fairly modest, especially in an era of the 'mega-merger.' However, conservative and carefully executed expansion has enabled Bracewell to develop in exactly the markets and practice areas they wanted, with an overall increase in the firm's capability, presence, and prestige.

Quality of Life

Since beginning its expansion into other markets, Bracewell has won substantial kudos in the areas of associate satisfaction. In the winter 1999 publication of *The Associate Magazine*, B&P was ranked number eight in associate retention among a study of nearly 200 large firms. In addition to an overall belief that the firm is one of the most humane workplaces around, every associate we have interviewed at the firm continues to believe that training at the firm is second to none. In the area of gender equality, Bracewell has also ranked high. The firm ranked second in a 1998 survey published in *Presumed Equal: What America's Top Women Lawyers Really Think About Their Firms*, a book about women's issues in major law firms written by Suzanne Nossel and Elizabeth Westfall. The book reported that, according to its respondents, concerted efforts to support and integrate women lawyers at Bracewell & Patterson have paid off. Women's opportunities for advancement at the firm are reportedly favorable, according to the book, and the firm's environment is hospitable. Although the feasibility of part-time arrangements and ability to sustain a home life are questioned, several respondents pointed to clients, not the firm as the source of the problem.

Prospects for the Future

All indicators point to Bracewell's continued success. And, through a conservative, focused, and determined acquisition strategy, Bracewell is emerging from the recession of the past 18 months stronger than ever. The firm offers an impressive and constructive case study for the growth of law firms that may ultimately be more 'recession proof' than their larger competitors.