

Mark F. Nowak, Partner at Thorp Reed Armstrong: Enjoy the Autonomy of Being a Lawyer

By Kenneth Davis

Civil trial lawyer Mark Nowak has had an interest in politics and government since he was very young, and he said that interest ultimately led him to consider a legal career.

Summary

Mark F. Nowak is a partner at Thorp Reed & Armstrong, a law firm in Philadelphia. Prior to joining the firm, he worked at two private practice firms and clerked for two federal judges. Nowak enjoys the autonomy of being a lawyer and the ability to represent many different types of clients.

Nowak views the practice of law as an opportunity to help people navigate complex legal issues and protect their interests. He particularly enjoys working on complex litigation, which he sees as an important way to advocate for his clients. In addition to his practice as a civil litigation attorney, he frequently lectures on topics concerning complex litigation.

Nowak finds the practice of law to be especially rewarding. He believes that being a lawyer means having the ability to protect people from corporate or governmental mistreatment, as well as defending them from false accusations. He prides himself on vigorously advocating for his clients and ensuring they are treated fairly in the legal system.

Nowak also enjoys the intellectual challenge of being a lawyer. He believes that the practice of law requires a deep understanding of both the law and the facts of a case. He finds that using his experience and knowledge of the law to help his clients is a very satisfying experience.

In addition to the intellectual and professional challenge of being a lawyer, Nowak finds the practice of law to be emotionally rewarding. He believes that he is helping people in a very tangible way and that his work can have a lasting impact on their lives.

In summary, Mark F. Nowak is a partner at Thorp Reed & Armstrong, a law firm in Philadelphia. He works on complex litigation and also lectures on related topics. He enjoys the autonomy of being a lawyer and the intellectual and emotional challenge of the practice of law. He sees it as an opportunity to help people navigate complex legal issues, protect their interests and ensure they are treated fairly in the legal system.

Mark F. Nowak: Partner at Thorp Reed Armstrong

Mark F. Nowak is a partner at Thorp Reed Armstrong (Thorp), a law firm in Sacramento, California. He is a litigator and primarily practices in the areas of general commercial litigation and intellectual property litigation. He has been with the firm since 2004 and is a member of the firm's Intellectual Property Practice Group.

Practicing Law with Autonomy

Nowak enjoys practicing law at Thorp, especially because of the autonomy it provides. He notes that he is not micromanaged and is able to make decisions and run his practice. He is also able to work on matters in which he is interested and to strive to give his clients the best representation possible.

A Passion for Intellectual Property Cases

Nowak puts a strong focus on intellectual property litigation and is passionate about his practice in this area. Intellectual property cases are particularly challenging, as they often involve delicate legal nuances and precise applications of law that require a thorough understanding and creative solutions. Nowak's passion drives him to work hard for his clients and to vigorously pursue their interests.

Educational Background

Nowak received his B.A. from the University of California in Santa Barbara in 1997 and his J.D from Hastings College of the Law in 2004. He is admitted to practice in California and the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California.

"It was probably around elementary school," he said. "And it related to some of the things that were occurring--presidential politics--and on the news, I saw people like Bobby Kennedy and others who were lawyers who were also politicians. So my interest primarily was in politics and government, and I always saw law as a flexible degree and one that could be used in lots of different ways, including politics."

Nowak added that his grandfather, who was a local councilman, also contributed to his growing interest in politics and law.

"My grandfather had been involved in politics," he said. "And he was a fellow I spent a good deal of time with and talked to him about politics and government. So he was a bit of a role model, although he wasn't a lawyer."

Those talks paid off. Nowak is now a partner at prominent law firm Thorp, Reed & Armstrong's Pittsburgh office. He handles civil cases, with a concentration on construction litigation. Nowak principally represents owners, contractors, architects, engineers, public agencies, and insurers in public, private, commercial, industrial, and institutional construction projects ranging in value from \$200,000 to \$320 million. He's also co-chair of the firm's [construction and land use practice group](#), is a member of the Academy of Trial Lawyers, and has prosecuted cases in state and federal courts, as well as before government agencies.

Nowak represented Allegheny Airport Authority when it sought to demolish the old Pittsburgh International Airport. A historic preservationist opposed the demolition and tried to have it stopped. The matter went before Justice David Souter of the United States Supreme Court in May of 1999.

"We had a motion that was decided by Justice Souter to essentially impose a bond requirement for an injunction to stop the demolition," Nowak said. "They couldn't post the bond, so the demolition continued, and we were able to build. We were able to demolish the old airport, and now there are a number of offices there; so that land has been reused and developed into productive use."

Nowak added that the new airport is not far from its old location.

Nowak was also involved in the petition three years ago that made the City of Pittsburgh a distressed city under Act 47.

"Essentially, a control board was put in place to assist the city in becoming economically viable," Nowak said. "And I represented the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development. I mean, the city understood that that's what had to happen. There were a number of other citizens and other groups who didn't feel that that was an appropriate remedy to assist the city, but we were successful."

Nowak also successfully represented a large Korean contractor in an action to recover amounts on a letter of credit for a \$320-million project in Israel.

In addition to running his practice, Nowak is general counsel for his firm. He said that as general counsel, he spends a good portion of his time representing his firm on ethics issues, conflict issues, contract review, and risk issues, such as suits against the firm. Nowak, who has served as his firm's general counsel for a little over a year, said the job is taking up a bit more of his time than he originally anticipated and that nearly half of his time is now spent on general counsel matters.

Nowak also handles mediations and arbitrations for construction-related cases. He has served as [mediator](#)

and arbitrator on major public construction projects in the Pittsburgh area. Furthermore, Nowak is on the American Arbitration Association (AAA) Construction Master Arbitrator Roster, which consists of the 100 most qualified and experienced arbitrators with construction industry experience. He serves on the AAA Mediation Panel, as well.

Nowak has also done a great deal of political work over the years as a volunteer. He said the volunteer work usually involved providing counsel on Election Day to various campaigns in Western Pennsylvania. In addition, he's involved in a number of nonprofit groups and charitable organizations and is dedicated to giving back to the community.

Nowak studied government as an undergrad at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, PA, and graduated in 1979. He then entered [Emory University School of Law](#) in Atlanta, GA, and earned his law degree in 1982.

After law school, Nowak worked as an Assistant County Solicitor for Allegheny County. As Assistant County Solicitor, he represented the government in civil litigation matters and also handled some prosecution related to environmental matters.

In 1986, he joined Thorp Reed as an associate, and he became a partner in 1991. He said one of the reasons that he joined the firm was that it enabled him to continue his involvement in community work as well as politics.

"In fact, it was encouraged," Nowak said. "So I came over to Thorp Reed, and at the time, my wife and I were having our first child, and it seemed like a good time to change, and I came over and have been here ever since--20 years."

He discussed what he enjoys most about his job:

"I think I enjoy the practice of law," he said. "I really do enjoy construction cases; I enjoy being able to be a mediator and resolve cases, and I also enjoy the autonomy of being a lawyer and having some ability to make decisions about what I do and how I do it."

Nowak said one of the most difficult challenges of his job is business development.

"That's one of the aspects that you always have to continue to do if you want to be a successful lawyer," he said.

Nowak said that one of his biggest influences has been former Thorp Reed partner John Bingler, who retired in 1998.

"John was a very dynamic guy who had all kinds of involvements," Nowak said. "He was a Navy Seal, a U.S. Attorney, a public safety director, President of the Allegheny County Bar Association, and has been nominated for the federal bench. He was a man recognized by other lawyers as a lawyer's lawyer. So he set a high standard and was a very good example on how to conduct yourself and the kind of goals you should strive for."

Nowak said others who have influenced him include Thorp Reed senior partner Dan Carney and Judge James McLean, whom he worked under when he was Assistant County Solicitor.

Nowak discussed what he believes are some of the most important issues facing the legal community today:

"I think one of the issues is maintaining civility and professionalism in the practice," he said. "I think supporting the judiciary when they come under what I consider often to be unfair attacks. I think promoting pro bono legal work, particularly for legal services organizations, is also important."

He had the following advice for young lawyers:

"I would say to pursue outside the work environment involvements that develop you as a person. Oftentimes, it brings joy or fun into your life, but it may also have a work-related benefit. It may assist in elevating your own personal profile but also the profile of your firm."

Nowak was born in Homestead, PA, and grew up in neighboring West Mifflin. His wife, Tina, is an anesthesiologist, and they have three sons: Ben (20), John (18), and Patrick (14). Nowak enjoys the outdoors; he's done some kayaking and is on the board of directors of Venture Outdoors.

Nowak discussed some of the professional goals he'd like to accomplish in the next few years:

"Well, at some point before I retire, I would like to go back into public service--[work for the government](#) again, federal government probably at some point, maybe in Washington, DC," he said.