

An Interview with Justin S. Smith, Esq.

by Nicole P. Dyszlewski, Esq., MLIS and Meghan L. Hopkins, Esq.

Focus on the Future is a spotlight series where members of the *Rhode Island Bar Journal* Editorial Board interview attorneys who are newer to the Rhode Island Bar.

> **What is your current title and position?**

I am a Department Attorney in the Complex Commercial Disputes Practice Group at Nixon Peabody.

> **What is a complex commercial dispute? What types of matters do you focus on?**

I help businesses and people with disputes regarding litigation. While I encounter a wide array of matters, I generally focus on commercial, real estate, and land use matters. I think it would be safe to say that most of my work can be traced back somehow to a breach of contract.

> **What do you actually do all day?**

Like all of us, I unavoidably spend a lot of my time responding to emails for clients and colleagues. In the office, I spend the majority of my time researching and drafting motions, memoranda, and written discovery. I appear regularly both in-person and virtually in state courts, arbitrations, and municipal bodies in Rhode Island.

> **Can you tell us one thing you have learned while being a new attorney?**

Being a new attorney, I learn something new every day. One thing that has stuck with me is treating everyone with whom you work as a client. As an attorney in a medium or large firm, your clients are really the partners and senior associates that assign you work, and we refer to them as "internal clients." Treating your internal clients with the same respect and level of service as an external client helps prepare you for the time when you eventually grow into your practice and start interfacing with clients on your own so that you consistently provide high-quality work-product and client service. Another thing I've learned is to manage expectations for yourself and for those with whom you work by communicating early and often, which will set you up for success in managing your time and efforts.

> **We have done a few of these interviews now and several of the new attorneys we have talked to mention the value of having a good reputation, even early on in your legal career. Have you thought much about this issue yet?**

All attorneys, young or experienced, and law students should be very conscious that this is a small legal community. Even if you don't go to court often, or even if you haven't been to networking events because of COVID, you should be aware of the interconnectedness of the Rhode Island legal community. You will see the same attorneys throughout your career, some of whom may even have been your classmates in law school. One thing that is so important to me is courtesy, both professional and personal. Courtesy goes a long way in our community. I am very aware of how I treat others, staying true to the golden rule, and treating others how I would want to be treated. Billable hours and books of business matter, but so does being a good person.



JUSTIN S. SMITH, ESQ.

> **Who is your biggest inspiration inside or outside of law?**

Inside of the law, I have been fortunate to find inspiration from the many individuals that have served as mentors to me during law school, my clerkship, and now during my career in private practice. I try to find what I think the most inspiring qualities are from each person, and work it into my day-to-day routine. Outside of the law, my inspiration comes from my family, who have always taught me that any goal is attainable with the right mindset and to approach life as if there are no problems, just solutions.

> **What do you do to de-stress?**

I try to decompress, get fresh air, and get my mind on something not related to work. When I need to clear my mind, I'll go for a long run around the city taking in the sights and sounds to (safely) distract myself while I run. I also enjoy getting on my bicycle, throwing on a podcast or audiobook, and riding from India Point Park to Bristol and back. When winter inevitably comes and I'm not able to go outside as much, I enjoy flipping through a cookbook and making a meal at home.

> **What is your favorite restaurant in Rhode Island?**

It's almost impossible to pick a favorite with all the options available in Rhode Island, but I have an affinity for Twin Oaks



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Thanks to Our CLE Speakers

The success of the Rhode Island Bar Association's Continuing Legal Education (CLE) programming relies on dedicated Bar members who volunteer hundreds of hours to prepare and present seminars every year. Their generous efforts and willingness to share their experience and expertise helps to make CLE programming relevant and practical for our Bar members. We recognize the professionalism and dedication of all CLE speakers and thank them for their contributions.



Below is a list of the Rhode Island Bar members who have participated in CLE seminars during the months of September and October.

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in Cranston, which I have been going to since I was a young child with my family. Chicken parmesan with ravioli, and a side-salad with the house creamy Italian dressing is my go-to selection.

> **Name one thing that you could not live without and why?**

I couldn't live without my journal. It's the first thing I look at when I'm planning my day, my week, my month, and even my year. It's where I keep my current to-do list, schedule, deadlines, personal goals, and progress towards completing those goals. I would be lost without it.

> **According to your firm's website, in 2020 you were named a Kids in Need of Defense Pro Bono Attorney of the Year, what does it mean to you?**

KIND provides legal assistance to immigrant children seeking asylum in the US. Without the pro bono attorneys graciously giving their time, these kids may not be able to stay in the US. It felt really good to be recognized for the efforts I put in for helping those kids, but it certainly felt better knowing I was able to help with something meaningful and that all four children I worked with are still safe in this country. I am immensely proud of this work.

> **How have you chosen to decorate your office?**

My office is a work in progress, I have what I call my "me wall" which contains my diplomas and bar admission certificates, I think that's the first thing you do when you get an office, right? I have a whiteboard that my colleagues and I use to keep score in various competitions we take part in, such as a recent Peloton competition. I also have a bookcase that houses my RWU Law mug, my lucky bar exam pencil, and some plants to bring some life to the space. I am open to any interior design suggestions.



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Providence, RI 02903
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