



Relationships *ARE* Paramount

by Dan Baldwin

“My favorite adage is that the most important things in life are not things. They are the relationships you have with friends and family. Both in my life and in my practice, it is my relationships that are paramount,” says Frank J. Johnson, Managing Partner of Johnson Fistel, LLP.

The firm employs ten lawyers, three paralegals, and one legal assistant working from offices in San Diego, New York City, and Marietta, GA and serves clients in the practice areas of business and commercial litigation.

Key to building and maintaining his professional relationships with both clients and counsel is a commitment to core values. Johnson says, “I have always insisted upon five core values from everyone in our firm: trust, hard work, determination, integrity, and excellence in everything we do. These are more than words on a piece of paper. They are part of what we believe and how we work.”

Johnson realized he wanted to become an attorney at age ten. As a school project he was required to interview someone in a profession he wanted to pursue. He interviewed his father’s lawyer, an event that led to a lifetime in the law.

Johnson credits two life-altering events that have directed his current path in legal and family relationships.

The first was leaving his partnership with Sheppard Mullin Richter and Hampton to form his own firm in 2004. His feelings toward relationships were an essential element of that move. His children were ages ten, eight and six. He says, “I spent more time with my family, particularly with my children. We went on more trips together, from camping in the desert to snowboarding in Mammoth to traveling around the world. But it wasn’t long before I was caught up in growing the firm and working long hours again to meet our clients’ needs.”

The other defining moment was a diagnosis of cancer in 2014—Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma. “It was actually a blessing, a reminder that everything can be over at any given moment. I’m glad to say that I’m now cancer free and feeling the temptation to get back on the proverbial corporate treadmill and continue growing the firm’s business. But I strive to remember the lessons from these events and focus on my relationships with family, friends, and colleagues,” Johnson says.

Johnson, who has lived in San Diego virtually all his life, currently resides in Poway. His wife is Tiffany Johnson, a Deputy Attorney General. They have four children, a son and three daughters, ages 22, 20, 18 and 11 respectively.

“My life outside of work has been about what my children are doing. Family is very important to me and I love my children more than anything in the world. Now that three have left the nest, I’ve had more time to meet the demands of running a growing law firm while fostering my personal relationships,” he says.

Johnson’s lawyering is also guided by “the Rule of Three-S,” something he credits to his time clerking for the Honorable John S. Rhoades, Sr. “The lessons I learned from him on effective lawyering and integrity continue to imbue my work and relationships today including the Rule of Three-S: Stand up so they can see you; Speak up so they can hear you; and Sit down so they will love you.” ■