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Working with Dad: Valley Attorneys Carry On the Family Business



Working with Dad: Valley Attorneys Carry On the Family Business

By Irma Mejia





This Father's Day, *Valley Lawyer* highlights father-son and father-daughter legal teams. They share what it's like to work with family and the lessons that have been passed down.

FAMILY BUSINESSES HAVE LONG BEEN A staple of our economy. A lot of time and energy go into honing a craft, building a clientele and maintaining a reputation. It's not unusual for children to follow in their parents' career footsteps and carry on their work and professional legacy. In celebration of Father's Day, *Valley Lawyer* is shining the spotlight on fathers who practice law alongside their adult children. While their personal bonds extend beyond the water cooler, they remain all about business. Their successful practices have been built on mutual respect and continuous learning. Together they have formed leading legal teams in the San Fernando Valley.

Marshall A. Glick and Heather P. Glick-Atalla Glick Atalla, APLC

Located in Sherman Oaks, Glick Atalla, A Professional Law Corporation, is a leading practice in estate planning and non-profit law. Founded by Marshall A. Glick in 1985 as Marshall A. Glick, APC, it expanded in 2010 with the addition of his daughter, Heather P. Glick-Atalla.

Having practiced law for 46 years, Marshall remains committed to a passion he picked up early in his career: non-profit law. He formed his first charitable organization, Committee to Bridge the Gap, in 1967 as a student at UCLA School of Law. (Impressively, that organization is still running.) After law school, he practiced in a few firms before going out on his own. As a sole practitioner, he focused his practice on estate planning, business law and real estate transactions before finding his niche in non-profit law. "I enjoy helping others achieve their charitable goals," Marshall explains. "In addition to helping others making positive changes in the world, I enjoy nonprofit law because it is completely non-adversarial and everybody wins." While he still does some business law and real estate transactions, the bulk of his practice is devoted to estate planning and non-profit law.

Marshall's devotion to charitable work extends beyond his practice. He has held leading positions in various charitable organizations such as the Greater Los Angeles-Orange County Chapter of the National Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. Additionally, Marshall helped to establish the UCLA Paralegal Program, one of the nation's first and most-widely recognized programs of its kind.

This leading practice has only been enhanced by the addition of Heather, a rising lawyer in her own right. Having graduated near the top of her class from University of San Diego School of Law, Heather got her start clerking

for a San Diego litigation firm and USD Law School's Entrepreneurship Clinic where she helped low-income community members start or expand their businesses. She continued her community work by volunteering with Bet Tzedek in Los Angeles where she assisted Holocaust survivors seeking reparations.

Heather's dedication to community service mirrored her own father's devotion to giving back. "Deep down I always knew I wanted to become a lawyer and I am sure that my dad had something to do with it," she says. "I remember having conversations with him when I was younger about his job and seeing the sparkle in his eyes whenever he spoke about an exciting new matter."

Luckily for Marshall, she got bitten by the legal bug. As a leading practitioner in his niche practice areas, Marshall's work was getting to be too much and he called on Heather to help with the caseload. "My dad has given me an opportunity that I could not pass up. Not many lawyers are given the keys to a law practice with a built-in client base, which I hope to continue serving for many years to come," says Heather. When asked if she always envisioned herself working with her dad, she admits it was always a possibility. "I tried to keep my options open after law school, but when I finally landed at my dad's office, it just felt right being there."

"Without a doubt, the high point of my career has been the privilege and great joy of practicing law with my daughter," explains Marshall. "I admit to pride of authorship but Heather is super smart, learns at light-speed, and can now run circles around me."

Their strengths complement each other and enhance their busy practice. Marshall brings decades of experience and what his daughter calls a "sixth-sense" about their clients' legal matters while Heather adds a fresh perspective, offering alternative ways of serving their clients. As she describes it, it's a terrific dynamic.

Though they always had a great relationship, working together required some adjustment. Initially, Heather found her father's computer software and networking system frustrating. "It took some time for me to bring the firm into the 21st century, but things are running much more smoothly since giving it a technological facelift," explains Heather.

Marshall also found he had to adapt in other ways, which could be difficult after practicing solo for 25 years. "We have a firm motto, taken from the classic movie *Ben Hur*: We keep you alive to serve this ship, so row well and live. I have never had to throw Heather overboard, although at times I have put my foot down regarding how an unusual provision in a document should be drafted," he says. "But



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more often than not, Heather has been able to convince me that her approach was an improvement over what I had previously written.”

Their adjustment period long over, Marshall declares that he can't imagine practicing law without her by his side. The feeling is mutual according to Heather. “I love working with my dad. Our bond has only strengthened during our five years of practicing together.”

From the very beginning, Marshall took Heather under his wing, including her in all interactions with clients. “I am incredibly grateful for this unique opportunity,” she says. “He has been a wonderful mentor to me.” But the student quickly caught up to the teacher. “I have feasted on her fresh ideas and intellectual brilliance,” explains Marshall. “Without my assistance she has developed new and advanced concepts in estate planning that I never dreamed of, which benefit clients in the lower to moderate estate value range. If anything, Heather now supervises me.”

“My dad always jokes that he taught me everything he knows about the law in under 5 minutes. In reality, I learn something new from him every day,” says Heather. “He is always offering me advice and tips about document drafting, client interaction, and most importantly, covering

my behind! I welcome his advice and constructive criticism. I hope to continue learning from him for many years to come.”

Outside the office, they enjoy family dinners and time with the newest addition to the family, Heather's son and Marshall's first grandchild. “He's a bit young to join the practice now but maybe someday it'll be Glick, Glick-Atalla, and Atalla,” she says.

After so many years of practicing, Marshall is confident about passing on the reins to his more-than-capable daughter. “She now carries the brunt of the client workload in our office and has assumed the primary responsibility for generating and servicing new business.” When asked what he hopes he achieved in teaching her, Marshall explains that he made it a point to instill in her an aversion to becoming a “stereotypical attorney.” “I have taught Heather the importance of attending to all clients as though they were close relatives; to spend all the time needed to research and draft documents to the best of her ability (even though all of the time spent in doing so cannot be billed); to return phone calls immediately; to complete legal work promptly; and to always strive to be an ethical and hardworking ‘lawyer's lawyer.’”

Jonathan and Marshall Cole Nemecek & Cole

Nemecek & Cole is a distinguished professional liability and business litigation firm. Founded in 1984 by Frank Nemecek and Jonathan B. Cole, the Sherman Oaks firm has grown to a mid-size law office with far-reaching influence and recognition. Founding partner Jonathan B. Cole is a certified specialist in legal malpractice law, with 38 years of experience in complex litigation. Under his leadership, the firm has thrived and grown to include more than twenty attorneys with a reputation for winning litigation and appellate work.

Five years ago, Jon welcomed his son, Marshall, to the firm. Before joining Nemecek & Cole, Marshall had been an associate in a large firm where he handled complex business, real estate and environmental litigation. In his current position, he handles cases in both state and federal court in a variety of matters including professional liability and real estate.

Marshall's move was warmly welcomed. "I had never thought about him following in my footsteps," says Jon. "But once Marshall became an attorney, I always secretly hoped that he would find his way here because I think family-owned and -operated businesses are a great thing."

While he didn't actively lobby for his son to follow his lead, he did have an impact on his son's decision. "It's really hard to pinpoint what inspired me to become a lawyer but watching my dad as I grew up definitely played a role," explains Marshall. When asked if he had always envisioned himself at his father's firm, he said it was difficult to say, partly because of the pressure such a move would create. "The thought of working at Nemecek & Cole was definitely intimidating at first, especially because of my father's reputation. I knew that he has some big shoes to fill and to the extent I would become a part of the business was both exciting and nerve-racking at the same time."

Marshall has adjusted well to the demands of the firm. "Since being here, I have enjoyed every minute of it," he says. "Each case brings an entirely new set of facts and new law which keeps things interesting and allows me to learn about areas of law that I never would have otherwise thought about."

In discussing the firm, he highlights its close-knit sense of community. "Nemecek & Cole is a true family environment. There are some staff members and attorneys who have been here for over 20 years and many of them have known me the majority of my life. It's an honor to work in such great company."

"At this point, Marshall pretty much handles his own caseload. Additionally, he has started to bring in his own business, which is very fun to watch," says Jon. "However, as managing partner in the office, I regularly meet with all associates to discuss their caseload and supervise with respect to strategy decisions and other case handling matters. Marshall is a hard worker and is treated like all other associates. He's not shy about asking for help or recognizing his weaknesses."

As a managing partner, Jon can be demanding but fair. "He's a pretty easygoing guy and I enjoy the cases that I have with him. As long as you get your work done with perfection, there is nothing to worry about," says Marshall. "If you don't, you're going to hear about it, which I think is pretty fair. He runs an extremely efficient operation and provides guidance whenever needed—oftentimes when I don't think it's needed, but it's ultimately helpful in the end.

"He is what I consider to be the preeminent attorney in professional liability defense, so I feel lucky to have such a great mentor. Any criticism I get is constructive and he allows me to make many strategy decisions throughout litigation which makes things more enjoyable."

As for Jon's evaluation of his son, he describes him as a great lawyer whose age has proven to be an asset. "He is a team player and brings camaraderie to the firm. He is also the youngest attorney at our firm to have jury trial experience,

which is extremely helpful around the office," says Jon. "He is great on his feet and provides insightful ideas with respect to trial preparation and delivery, which I have found extremely helpful with cases I take to trial. Having a young pair of eyes looking at a case in preparation for trial makes a tremendous difference with respect to trial strategy."

As a mentor, Jon is imparting invaluable knowledge. "He has taught me and continues to teach me the specialty of professional liability defense work and is also teaching me the ins and outs of the law business and law firm management," says Marshall. "The amount I have taken away, and hope to continue to take away, is so immense that I cannot list all that I have learned."

With a so many associates on staff, this father-son team actually didn't work together much when Marshall first came onboard. But over the years, their collaboration has increased to the point that they now work together on about three-fourths of Marshall's case load. Still, due to their busy workloads, they spend surprisingly little time together in the office. "Not only do we work on opposite sides of the office, but our schedules generally differ quite dramatically on a daily basis," explains Marshall. "We probably only see each other in



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the office once or twice a week.” Jon adds, “We have a great relationship outside the office and having him in the office is an added bonus.”

They enjoy spending time together outside of work. “For both of us, working in the same office is quite fun,” explains Marshall. “Since we both get along very well it allows us to have more opportunities to socialize and be involved in each other’s lives than we would otherwise be able to. We both have similar passions and have a very close family, so the time we spend with each other outside of work would probably be the same whether or not we worked together.”

In addition to their shared interest in the law, they also are action-sport aficionados. “We enjoy the same activities, which include snow skiing, mountain biking, and water skiing,” says Marshall. “We also have no problem just

lounging around or spending time together. I truly enjoy all the time I get to spend with my father.”

One might assume that all the time spent together might make Marshall stand out as his father’s favorite among his two siblings. But Jon is quick to snuff out such suggestions. “They have all achieved their own successes in life, so I don’t think there is even a need for jealousy. If anything, they are competitive, which I think is a good thing because competition breeds success,” he explains.

Asked what he hopes to have been able to teach his son during their time working together, Jon replies, “To work hard, play hard and never give up. And to always remember that the ‘champ closes the show.’” Looking back on past Father’s Day celebrations, Jon remembers his favorite gift from Marshall being a poem. “It was a pretty amazing poem about my life, both hilarious and touching.”

Harold W. and Alan J. Wax Law Offices of Wax & Wax

The Law Offices of Wax & Wax is a long-established firm specializing in workers' compensation and Social Security disability matters. Partners Harold W. Wax and Alan J. Wax are both certified legal specialists in workers' compensation. This father-son team has been working together in the San Fernando Valley for 28 years.

Harold, who recently celebrated his 90th birthday, has been practicing law since 1952. He established his own firm in 1959 under the name of Wax & Sayble and later Wax & Appell. His son, Alan, joined him in 1987 when together they founded Wax & Wax. By this time, Harold had already made an impact in the field of workers' compensation. He had served as president of both the Lawyers Club of Los Angeles (1976) and the California Applicant Attorneys Association (CAAA, 1969), of which he was a founding member. He remains an active member of the CAAA's Board of Governors. In 1997, Harold was honored with the Eugene Marias Lifetime Achievement Award by the CAAA.

Alan joined his father's practice fresh out of law school. Along with his own knowledge and fresh perspective, he was able to benefit from his father's years of experience. The knowledge Harold had to impart on Alan helped establish the new firm as a trusted name in

workers' compensation. Alan distinguished himself with his own exceptional work, establishing the Los Angeles Valley Applicant Attorneys Association and serving as its first president. He is a recipient of the Los Angeles Professional Excellence Award and is also an active member of the CAAA's Board of Governors.

Alan credits his father with inspiring his success, though the inspiration took a while to become clear. "At first I did not want to just follow in my dad's footsteps. I was a rebel without a clue but then I wised up," he says. "My dad was a highly respected leader in workers' compensation law and I was very proud to be in the same field of law."

For Harold, the inspiration to practice law came early on in the sixth grade. "I wanted to help people and I thought that was the best way for me," he explains. Though the right career path wasn't immediately clear to his son, Harold recognized certain personality traits in Alan that were to signal his success in law. "He was always very outgoing and a strong leader."

Alan's career trajectory required that he work his way up in the firm, from file clerk to paralegal, to associate before becoming partner. Remarkably, his path to partnership took only six months. It wasn't a complete breeze though, as he still had to meet his father's expectations. "I believe he did expect more of



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me, but I did not think he treated me any harder than the other associates,” says Alan. “He is not big on praise but I know he is proud of me.” Alan, who has been in charge of managing the office for about 15 years now, remembers his father as always being fair.

Working together is something they have enjoyed a lot. “It’s comforting knowing you are working with someone you can trust and has your best interest at heart,” says Harold. Recently, Harold has been handling the Social Security disability cases while Alan manages the workers’ compensation cases. The crossover in which a client has both types of matters is only about 25%, but they still speak to each other almost every day. “We have our own responsibilities and don’t step on each other’s toes,” explains Alan. After so many years working together, they’ve become very close, even sharing rooms at CAAA conventions and board meetings.

Of course, they spend a considerable amount of time outside the office. “We share meals at different restaurants,” says Alan. “We are both Dodger fans but he went to USC and I went to UCLA.”

“Lately, I go over to his house to play paddle tennis in his backyard with my brother and sister and their kids and mine,” says Alan. It’s the grandchildren that Harold enjoys seeing most. When asked to identify the greatest gift Alan has given him, he replies that it’s his two granddaughters.

After nearly three decades of working together, Alan credits his father with teaching him about respect, integrity, and being a good and fair leader. For his part, Harold hopes to have imparted the value of giving back to the profession and helping fellow attorneys. “I hope I have taught him to participate and help other lawyers in the practice of law, especially in worker’s compensation.” 

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