

SHARING TALES OF LIFE AND LAWYERING

Gather three new Hall of Famers, and what do you get? A licensed boat captain. An aspiring gestalt therapist. And a would-be contestant on the TV show American Ninja Warrior—if she could only find the time to work out.

FT: Congratulations to you, three of our new inductees into the Legal Eagles Hall of Fame. As you know, that means you've made our Legal Eagles ranking 10 years in a row, and now I will ask you: What is your claim to fame as an attorney, the thing for which you'd like to be known?

Amy Cheng, Cheng Cohen: For starting Cheng Cohen in 2007. It was simple stupidity or lack of sense [laughs]. I really wanted to focus on franchising so it made sense.

Joseph Adler, Hoffer Adler: I came from a big firm. In 2004 we started our franchise boutique firm and I never looked back. We had nothing. We started from zero.

Amy Cheng: I still remember my first day. We walked from DLA Piper in Chicago, with empty boxes and put them on a table, and then we put a big bucket of KFC on the box.

FT: You literally walked from DLA to your new space the same day?

Amy Cheng: Yes! I had to work, right? I couldn't take a day off.

Joel Buckberg, Baker, Donelson: I left after 26 years as an in-house lawyer at Cendant, which broke itself up. I didn't want to continue to live in New Jersey, either. I went back into private practice in Tennessee, and had the opportunity to look at franchising as an industry. I created an adaptive model of industry service. It brings everything together under one roof.

FT: To the two firm founders, what's one thing you wish "they" would have told you, about being an entrepreneur?

Amy Cheng: The hardest thing I have had to do is to get together a great crew. I was at the IFA five or six years ago, and the speaker said, you have to get the wrong people off the bus. Now we have a great team, but that's hard to do.

Joseph Adler: The first time I terminated a client was difficult. I don't mean I killed them [laughs]. But if this person is not making my life better...



▲ Left to right: Joseph Adler, Hoffer Adler; Amy Cheng, Cheng Cohen; and Joel Buckberg, Baker Donelson, are new inductees into the Legal Eagles Hall of Fame.

FT: They have to go?

Joseph Adler: You learn a lot through those experiences.

Amy Cheng: I now do due diligence before I accept a client.

FT: Joel, what is your lesson learned from being at Cendant?

Joel Buckberg: I came from an intense service culture. Cendant was a very big franchisor, very sales-driven. I realized business culture had advanced past franchise private practice. Other leaders in my firm saw the

same thing, the need to offer much better client service.

FT: What's been your worst day ever as an attorney?

Joseph Adler: I was an associate and I was working for a well-known lawyer in Toronto. He was a miserable man. We had to make a long distance call, and I didn't know the calling code. I said I'd run to my office and get it. He pulls out his wallet and waves it in front of his face. "We're losing money," he said. It was the first time I walked out on

someone. When I came back the next day he apologized profusely, but that was when I determined I had to leave. The worst day ever turned out to be an opening for me.

Joel Buckberg: When I was an in-house lawyer I was in charge of the FDDs, and that included certifying that all was correct. Three months later fraud was found. I was sweating bullets because I had certified those documents. Living through that was horrible. Ultimately the CEOs of the other company went to jail.

Amy Cheng: Within the last six months I had a long-time great client, and he got into huge financial trouble. It's a bad feeling. It's almost like a family member.

FT: OK, flip side. What's your best day ever as an attorney?

Joel Buckberg: When I left the office early the other day to see my new granddaughter.

FT: Lovely! Is that your first?

Joel Buckberg: Yes, she's in Denver.

Joseph Adler: For me it wasn't one day, it was gradual, when you realize that you develop an expertise over time. I'm always struck when people say, what do you think, and I think, why are you asking me? It's a gradual carving out of a specialty.

Amy Cheng: Once again I'll use short-term memory. I received the Crystal Compass award, yesterday at the International Franchise Association convention. The award is for leadership in franchising. As an attorney I have the legal background, but with management and leadership, that one I had no training for.

FT: So how did you learn those leadership skills?

Amy Cheng: I think my husband would tell you I was born telling people what to do [laughs.] When you're running a firm it's a challenge. You're motivating millennials and boomers.

FT: Joel, you're nodding in agreement.

Joel Buckberg: Maybe I have the most gray hair of the group, but the generational change, previously it was gradual. Today the difference between boomers and millennials is dramatic, and as Amy says, the clients now are millennials.

FT: Who is your favorite Supreme Court justice?

Joseph Adler: I'm Canadian, so what do I care? I'll say Bora Laskin, who served on the Supreme Court of Canada. I enjoyed reading his judgments.

Joel Buckberg: I'm a big Scalia fan, and I have a story about him. One of my partners decided she'd had enough of practicing law, and they quit to be entrepreneurial and opened a pizza restaurant in East Nashville. One day there were three gentlemen in black suits, earpieces and sidearms. They walk in

HALL OF FAME 2016

Franchise Times welcomes these 11 attorneys to the new 2016 Hall of Fame, indicating attorneys who have made the Legal Eagles list for 10 years in a row.

- Nina Greene, *Genovese Joblove & Battista*
- Stuart Hershman, *DLA Piper*
- Joseph Adler, *Hoffer Adler*
- Amy Cheng, *Cheng Cohen*
- Gary Duvall, *Dorsey & Whitney*
- Michael Gray, *Gray Plant Mooty*
- Quentin Wittrock, *Gray Plant Mooty*
- Joel Buckberg, *Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz*
- Max Schott II, *Gray Plant Mooty*
- Joel Siegel, *Dentons US*
- Rachel Stark, *Stark & Stark*

and look around, and then who walks in but Antonin Scalia. This had to be the only pizza restaurant owned by two lawyers, and a Supreme Court justice walks in. Apparently everywhere he went he looked for the best pizza in town.

Amy Cheng: Justice Ginsburg is a foodie too. I've met her. I was amazed at how approachable she is.

FT: What's your workday "uniform?"

Joseph Adler: You're looking at it: Jeans, sportcoat, shirt. I've got a lot of ties hanging on the back door of my office, just in case I need to grab one for court.

Joel Buckberg: I'm an old-school suit guy.

FT: Who would play you in your film biography?

Joel Buckberg:

Seth Rogan.

Joseph Adler:

They say I look like Michael Douglas when he was younger.

Amy Cheng: I have no idea.

FT: What are you reading, following or listening to these days?

Joel Buckberg: I'm a hockey fan, so I'm following the Nashville Predators. I'm keeping one eye on the election, which is getting scarier and scarier.

Joseph Adler: In my free time I'm training to become a gestalt therapist. I'm in year four of a five-year program. I like the study of relationships. When I retire I want to do something different.

FT: Describe the "gestalt" part.

Joseph Adler: It's relational. It's not about objectifying clients. It's what are you experiencing right now.

Amy Cheng: The only thing I'm following is American Ninja Warrior, the TV show. I have little ones at home.

FT: What's the best advice you give to clients?

Joseph Adler: No matter how well drafted the agreement is, it's about the relationship. Keep me right by your side. Engage me as much as you can.

FT: What are the cases or legal issues you're watching closely?

Joel Buckberg: We're watching the evolution of joint employer exposure. You do not want to be employers of the franchisee's employees.

"There are no shortcuts in franchising. You can't shortcut your way to success."

Joel Buckberg, Baker, Donelson

FT: If you weren't a franchise attorney, you would be...

Joseph Adler: A therapist.

Amy Cheng: An American Ninja Warrior. I'd work out constantly.

FT: I've seen those contestants. They have abs of steel.

Joel Buckberg: I'm a licensed captain and I'd love to be running tour boats in the Virgin Islands.

FT: Now there's an image to end on.

—Interview by
Beth Ewen

