

Divorce Story

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NEWPORT BEACH — As an accomplished family law firm with a client base that includes prominent people with complex asset disputes, Minyard Morris LLP has two policies it says help distinguish its lawyers from hard-charging divorce practitioners in Orange County: confidentiality and congeniality.

The firm prides itself on a respectful approach to the often messy area of family law, with an emphasis on aggressive strategy, settlement and staying above the fray that can so often define the emotionally fraught battles.

“We try to self select out those kinds of people who just want revenge,” said firm founder Mark E. Minyard. “I am very good friends with many, many, many of my former clients, and I don’t want to be good friends with somebody who’s that style of a person.”



Partners Mark E. Minyard, Matthew S. Buttacavoli, Lonnie K. Seide and Michael A. Morris.
Photo: Nicole Tyau / Daily Journal.

Minyard and his colleagues also don’t publicly discuss their clients, and their confidentiality policy is prominently stated on the firm’s website and widely known by referring attorneys. It’s often a key selling point, with Minyard recently handling a divorce for a multibillionaire who contacted him because of it.

Gregory L. Weeks, a sole practitioner who referred the multibillionaire to Minyard, called Minyard “our go-to guy in Orange County” for family law and said his confidentiality policy is “very vitally important.”

“It makes people more secure and feel more comfortable with the whole situation,” said Weeks, former general counsel to Oakley Inc.

Minyard applies the policy not just to news media interviews but to private conversations with friends and family. He said he understands the philosophy of lawyers who discuss their clients, but “we just don’t do it.”

“Some people have the attitude of, ‘Well, it’s public knowledge. You can go to the courthouse and figure it out,’” Minyard said. “Well then, let somebody go to the courthouse and figure it out.”

Minyard started practicing in 1976 and opened his own firm in 1978. He hired his first associate in the firm’s second year “so that I could take a vacation.” It didn’t stick: Minyard said he’s taken two weeks off in the last 10 years. He loves his job, and the firm constantly fields more inquiries than it could ever accept as cases, he said.

Of the estimated 80 to 100 calls received every month, the firm accepts about 15. The firm has had 14 to 16 attorneys for the last 20 or so years with case complexity and client quality growing with the selectivity.

Name partner Michael A. Morris joined 31 years ago; partner Lonnie K. Seide joined 28 years ago and partner Matthew S. Buttacavoli joined 11 years ago. The firm moved from Orange 14 years ago after buying an office in Newport Beach, which is now home to a bevy of high-end art work.

Nine firm lawyers are what Minyard calls “primaries,” meaning they have their caseloads but all work together. Minyard, who hosts mandatory strategy meetings three times a week, stays current on all cases, from inception to trial planning.

Minyard said the firm is not seniority based but is a “meritocracy” with an emphasis on education and mentoring that includes training programs, such as the week-long National Family Law Trial Institute in Houston, which four attorneys attended last year.

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The firm doesn’t accept cases outside Orange County, and it focuses its charitable efforts on Orange County causes, such as Human Options, the Legal Aid Society of Orange County, the Public Law Center and the Veterans Legal Institute. Morris is on Human Options’ board of directors, and Buttacavoli thrice co-chaired the Public Law Center’s silent auction committee for its annual dinner while Minyard has served on the dinner organizing committee. Minyard also was a member of the board of directors for Project Youth OCBF, formerly the Orange County

Bar Foundation, and he recently wrapped up his year-long chairmanship of the Orange County Bar Association's Masters Division.

"He's extremely enthusiastic about everything he does, and it's infectious," said Dean J. Zipser of Umberg Zipser LLP, president of the Orange County chapter of the Federal Bar Association. He said Minyard has "boundless energy."

"He loves to work, and at the same time, he'll find time to give back to the professional community," Zipser said.

Minyard believes clients are key to a lawyer's happiness. He's looking for clients he can make happy and who match the firm's philosophy of valuing strategy and good results over aggressiveness. The firm puts a lot of weight on comments from potential clients during intake phone calls, and words matter, he said.

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Steven J. Katzman of Bienert | Katzman PC said the firm achieves "phenomenal" results.

"I know many attorneys who have gone to him for family law issues — prominent attorneys," Katzman said. "It's sort of like if you're a heart surgeon and other heart surgeons are coming to you."