

Bond Schoeneck COO On Law Firms' Biggest Challenge

By **Sarah Martinson**

Law360 (March 4, 2022, 11:20 AM EST) -- Bond Schoeneck & King PLLC Chief Operating Officer Bryan Donohue's relationship with the firm began 15 years ago when he was chief financial officer at daily newspaper The Buffalo News.

While Donohue was at the News, Bond Schoeneck was the newspaper's lead counsel in a wide range of matters including union bargaining, employment benefits and mergers and acquisitions, Donohue told Law360 Pulse in a recent interview.

"We also got into multiemployer pension plans with several of our unions — that is a highly specialized area — and Bond has a really good resource here that walked me through that entire process and helped me negotiate with those multiemployer plans," Donohue said.

In 2013, Donohue was promoted to senior vice president, chief operating officer and treasurer at The Buffalo News. He left the newspaper in 2019 to join Buffalo-based accounting firm Freed Maxick.

Here, Donohue, who started at Bond Schoeneck on Feb. 14, spoke with Law360 Pulse about his new gig and the biggest challenge facing law firms. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What are your responsibilities in your new role?

My role as chief operating officer is to manage the administrative side of the business — marketing, information technology, human resources, accounting, office services — all of those back office-related functions that are needed by a significant law firm to operate in today's world. My job is to make sure that all of those areas work in harmony together, so that they can present a product ... and we can get our work done more efficiently.

How is your new role different from your previous role, if at all?

I was doing primarily the same function. It's different from The Buffalo News in that we don't have a manufacturing plant. At The News, we had manufacturing plants, and I had to take care of all of that, plus we had significant facilities that we owned. I also was in charge of facilities. When you come in to a professional services firm, you lose all of that.

What will be the biggest challenge in your new role?

On day 10, I think the biggest challenge is learning everything that I need to know about this company. There's so many practice areas, offices and clients. You just have to, in the beginning, learn about the firm, people [and] services, and what our plans are going forward.

What the market wants and how we move into those areas. Data privacy [is a] huge area. I read this morning that that is becoming a

major topic with all of the states. They're looking and saying, "We need to have federal legislation to make sure all of the states are kind of playing by the same rules." So that's going to be a giant area that every client is going to be affected by. That's going to be a big area that we have to move into, and it's evolving.

What are your goals for the firm?

Growth is always a goal: How can I come into this position and help the firm continue to grow and evolve and meet the demands of the future? I have to help try and figure out what the future's going to be, and how can I help drive that into the firm.

What do you think is the biggest challenge facing law firms today?

Talent, and it's the same thing that was going on in the accounting industry. Talent is just so hard to find and retain. There's so much work out there. We found this at Freed Maxick. We just couldn't find all of the talent.

As the pandemic has pushed us into the ability to work [remotely], we could hire somebody in California to work for New York. The problem with law firms is licensing. You don't have that same problem in accounting. So while the pandemic has opened up the world to talent, and they can go out and search positions anywhere in the world and work from home, it's also allowed firms like us and other firms to seek talent elsewhere to help us.

--Editing by Alyssa Miller.