

RORY WEILER

Doing the Right Thing to Assist His Clients, Invest in Profession

by Dan Campana

ST. CHARLES—It might have been his young admiration for Perry Mason or that, as a kid, he read a lot books and talked so much that people told him he should become a lawyer.

A lack of artistic prowess also could have something to do with Rory T. Weiler's destined career choice.

"Ever since I can remember, I always wanted to be a lawyer—with the exception of a brief dalliance in high school into architecture," Weiler says. "As it turns out, you have to be able to draw. I talk much better than I draw.

"As a result, the law thing seemed to work out pretty well," he adds with a laugh.

Weiler, a principal with **Weiler & Lengle PC** in St. Charles, has made the law his life. In doing so, he's developed a practice that rightfully places divorce cases under the broader family law category because of their ever complicated construction. Child custody and personal finances are just two examples Weiler offers to counter the fallacy that divorces are simple to handle.

"This is not easy stuff. Anybody who thinks it is (easy) is fooling themselves. There's no question that the entire practice—and I'm sure it has in every discipline—has gotten dramatically more complicated," says Weiler, 60. "Being able to help people get through a divorce is, I think, the most satisfying part of my job."

He also takes great pride in using his experience and longevity to give something back to the profession through pro bono work and, more recently, by working side by side with his son.

Learning How to Do It Right

Weiler grew up on Chicago's South Side where his "humble beginnings," as he puts it, involved a father who drove a CTA bus and a mother who stayed home to care for the kids. He acknowledges the idea of a young kid having dreams of being a lawyer "sounds hokey, only because it is hokey.

"I always thought of the law as being this noble profession that was important," Weiler says. "I'm really a sap when it comes to the idea we're a government of laws, not men, and the law protects people—all of those good concepts, which sometimes don't get as much attention as they should."

The first in his family to go to college, Weiler was a journalism major at Northern Illinois University. After graduating in 1975, Weiler headed to Chicago's John Marshall Law School, where he took classes at night after days working at a law firm.



"I'll tell you that I learned how to do the right thing by seeing how the wrong thing was done," Weiler explains of his clerking experience while in law school. "Those lessons stuck with me: having integrity, telling the truth and being straight with the clients even when a lot of times they don't want you to be straight with them."

He earned his law degree in 1979, by which time he was married with a son and living in Batavia. He landed his first job in the rural community of Elburn in western Kane County at the firm run by Mel Dunn.

"Did I want to be a divorce lawyer when I came out of law school? Not really," Weiler says. "Like a lot of kids today, I was just looking for a job."

Dunn ran a general practice that required Weiler to become nimble in what he did to serve clients, although there was an adjustment period to work life in Elburn.

"It was like being a stranger in a strange land for quite a while. Being a city guy, I knew where all the good hot dog and Italian beef and pizza places were," he says. "When you start talking about this section and how many acres, reading legal descriptions, talking about grain being siloed—all these terms were completely foreign to me."

The diversity in workload, from criminal cases to the early semblance of his family law focus, proved valuable in what he wanted to do and what he chose to stay away from.

"I met my first real criminal and I said, 'This isn't something I've got any stomach for,'" he recalls.

What he did take away from his two years with Dunn, before Dunn became a judge, was the recognition of how much of his work tied back to helping people in stressful times. In 1982, Weiler took over the practice which has been his since. The firm has been known as Weiler & Lengle since 2006.

In addition to Dunn, Weiler credits David Peskind and Ben Schwarz for setting him in the right direction.

"When I was a younger lawyer, I came to the conclusion early on that not only did I not know everything, I didn't know jack," he says.

His formative years left Weiler with a key perspective that he has never wavered from.

"You need to be prepared because your clients count on you to do the very best job you can because this is important to them," Weiler explains. "Preparation is the key. You have to really know the facts of your case."

Developing Family Law Practice

Weiler didn't necessarily intend to make divorce the focus of his practice. It just grew as his reputation did.

"You do a good job on one, that begets more referrals and pretty soon before you know it, you don't have time to do anything else," he says.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, Weiler's practice was almost entirely family law work. He joined local and state bar associations and honed his skills in a variety of ways. He thrives on the variety of people and situations which arise

because each scenario offers an opportunity to learn something new. It also means understanding how to read and react to a client and his or her specific needs and personality.

"You may have handled 50 or 60 divorces, but this is, usually, that client's first go-around at it," Weiler offers. "Each and every case presents with different issues."

First and foremost, Weiler aims to "manage expectations" with his clients. He suggests some attorneys won't quash a client's unrealistic beliefs, but will quickly lay blame elsewhere when those expectations are not met.

"At the initial conference I tell them, 'I'm not the lawyer that tells you what you want to know. I'm going to tell you what you need to hear. And, a lot of what you're going to hear is not going to be something that you like, but it's going to be the truth,'" Weiler says. Many clients quickly realize his approach of "giving it to you straight" is best, he says.

Frank Laskaris says Weiler handled his "very high conflict case" with a "high level of integrity."

"He's very professional, not a speculator at all," Laskaris says. "He came highly recommended and lived up to it."

A self-described pessimist, Weiler would rather be pleasantly surprised by a better-than-expected outcome than to have set the target too high and miss it. The combination of preparation and honesty befits his perspective on how best to get business taken care of, especially in Kane County where the core of family law attorneys remains generally cooperative.

"The beauty of the practice in Kane County is that it's still very collegial," he says. "Civility is good for business."

Being thorough and prepared also helps.

"Preparation is what settles case," Weiler says. "If the judge thinks you're prepared, if your opposing colleague thinks you're prepared, that's when people go ... 'I know this guy's ready to go, I think you might want to consider settling this case.'"

Weiler also stresses the importance of an even keel, cool-headed approach during tense times.

"In the great poker game of life, they're all trying to get you on tilt," Weiler explains.

Laskaris adds, "Family law can be volatile and full of emotion. He seems to find a way to minimize the conflict."

That point is another key part of what Weiler aims to accomplish for his clients. He treats the process and the participants in a divorce case with dignity and respect because, while his involvement lasts only so long, the divorcing couple will likely continue to be linked via children or in other ways after things are done.

Weiler also finds a higher obligation exists to bring legal services to those not able to afford it. He has been honored by the Kane County Bar Association and state bar associations, as well as Legal Services Corporation, for his pro bono work.

"As professionals, it's important for us to provide access to justice to people who don't have the financial means to get it," Weiler says.

Eye on the Next Generation

Weiler has stayed sharp on family law over the years through a variety of teaching and writing opportunities. He's instructed numerous classes and seminars on family law topics in the last decade and penned several articles for the Illinois State Bar Association. In 2012, he published a book titled *Divorce Tools and Techniques*.

Weiler devotes his spare time to helping to "raise the bar, so to speak, in our profession by speaking at seminars, by writing and putting on presentations."

He's also interested in more direct ways of enhancing the legal profession's next generation by finding mentoring opportunities for today's new breed of attorneys.

"The old paradigm when I got out of law school was you took a job with an older lawyer, and he taught you the ropes," Weiler says. "That kind of sharing of wisdom just doesn't exist for the most part these days because there are not a lot of legal jobs out there to assimilate all the kids."

The issue has taken on a more personal meaning for Weiler, who now works side by side with his son, Tim. Weiler says his son's arrival in the legal profession came as a second career and after years of rebuffing the suggestion of going to law school. A couple of years ago, Tim approached him while they were golfing with the idea of making the leap.

"I said, 'Did you just tell me that so I'd miss that putt or is this for real?'" Weiler recalls.

Tim Weiler worked at the firm during law school summers and was hired in March 2012.

"There's certainly a high bar set for me," Tim says. "It's a very fun, entertaining, rewarding environment, mostly because of my dad and how he treats people."

Tim adds that his father goes out of his way to answer questions and offer guidance.

"Our strategy sessions don't feel like work, it's like sitting around the dinner table," Tim says.

Weiler doesn't hesitate when asked about what it means to have Tim around.

"It reinvigorated me to be able to teach my son about the profession I love," Weiler says. "From my perspective, it's the most professionally gratifying thing I've ever experienced. Every day is a blessing."

The benefits of practicing in the western suburbs have always been clear to Weiler, who works a short distance from home and his wife of 37 years, Susan. It provided him the opportunity to be part of his kids' activities during their school years and gave him time to serve the community on the Batavia City Council for 10 years.

There's also the professional side of living and working in the suburbs that extends beyond not having to commute into Chicago.

"The practice is different (in Chicago). People aren't accountable for what they say and what they do down there because of the volume of lawyers and the volume of cases," Weiler says. "It's a much less stressful practice here. You can make the practice less stressful by just doing the right thing. Tell the truth. Stand by your word." ■