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# ATTORNEY AT LAW

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# Hiscock & Barclay, LLP: Distinction Is Earned

By Lalaena Gonzalez-Figueroa

*As a well-established law firm with over 150 years in existence, Hiscock & Barclay LLP seemed destined for a steady, if not predictable, pattern of growth. Long known throughout Upstate New York and the surrounding regions for its focus on providing exceptional client care and strategic representation, the firm enjoyed a robust clientele and a strong group of legal professionals who, as a whole, maintained a solid position in a steady market. An unexpected turn of events might have decimated a lesser firm, but thanks to the adaptability and vision of its leadership team and partners, Hiscock & Barclay has emerged as an innovative firm with an exciting outlook.*

In the mid-1990s, a bank merger effectively obliterated a significant portion of Hiscock & Barclay's business...and revenue. It was a trying time, and the firm's restructuring process was a drastic endeavor. A 100-lawyer firm quickly dropped to roughly 50, and leadership was forced to reexamine

the firm's fundamental vision and direction. "It was a challenging time," recalls Managing Partner John Langan, who had been elevated to partnership just three months earlier. "The partners decided to stick together and rebuild the remaining practices, which was both gutsy and inspiring."



Photo by Charles Wainwright

Once the company was stabilized, Langan joined a small management team intent on rebuilding the firm, making it stronger and more resilient to subsequent industry changes. “In following some core business principles, we recognized the need to grow a suite of practices that would support existing and future clients while avoiding concentrating too much on a single industry,” he explains. The group identified the energy industry as an ideal channel in which to expand, and in a series of serendipitous developments, the State of New York announced a plan to deregulate and break up the utilities operating in that that very industry. In less than seven years, Hiscock & Barclay augmented its energy client base from a single utility to more than 20 energy businesses, utilizing existing expertise and strategic lateral growth to accomplish its goals.

The process was organic, notes Langan, who lauds the adaptability of Hiscock & Barclay’s partners and their willingness to embrace a changing profession and more focused business principles in running the revamped firm. The traditionally high-risk growth plan through lateral expansion succeeded in large part to the firm’s approach to evaluating proposed deals: honest and robust information from leadership laid out the pros and cons of each opportunity. “We made calculated moves in order to grow effectively and in a manner that would maintain a focus on our clients,” Langan explains. In addition to expanding into the energy sector, the firm also built the largest Intellectual Property group in the state with the exception of those operating from New York City. Created with a realistic understanding of the industry’s unique needs and motivations, the group has flourished; in less than a decade the IP group has exploded into a \$10 million-plus operation that features attorneys with arts and science backgrounds and advanced degrees in a range of fields including electrical engineering, bio sciences, chemistry, and mechanical engineering. “It’s an authentic group of accomplished professionals in their respective fields,” asserts Langan who observes that the group and its subsequent IP litigation team are operating at a national practice level.

The success of Hiscock & Barclay’s lateral expansion has hinged upon the firm’s unique ability to foster and maintain



**Associates and Partners of Hiscock & Barclay socialize at a recent gathering hosted at John Langan’s home.**

*The accolades extended beyond the firm. In 2010 Hiscock & Barclay was awarded the President’s Pro Bono Service Award from the New York State Bar Association, a veritable coup for a midsize firm.*

a strong bond among the partners across offices and diverse practice areas. An extraordinary level of communication, notes Langan, is a foundation of that atmosphere. He offers, “Without a genuine and frank dialogue, how can we really create high performing teams for our clients?” That dialogue encourages honest and regular communication among attorneys, administrative staff, and personnel. Client feedback is routinely solicited by practice group leaders who are charged with acquiring information and making sure that clients see their ideas and suggestions implemented. When improvements are made they are consistently applied across the firm’s offices in New York State, as well as in Boston, Washington D.C. and Toronto, ensuring a congruent experience for attorneys and clients alike. Growth has provided ample opportunities to build business across practice areas, and attorneys are encouraged to cultivate relationships with colleagues whose areas of expertise may be utilized by clients in their group. The entrepreneurial approach has not only facilitated improved attitudes toward newcomers to the practice, but also exponentially improves the customer experience for clients who appreciate a consistent and more comprehensive level of legal representation.

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While growth has been an exciting process, it has also, acknowledges Langan, been an exhausting effort. "We are committed to success, and this means we are always willing to evaluate and reevaluate best practices," he offers. "It has been a tremendous endeavor, one that has enabled us to add incredible talent to the firm for the benefit of our clients." A collective consciousness has created an almost tangible momentum within the firm, where exceptional attorneys pave the path to new opportunities.

Of the ongoing developments within Hiscock & Barclay, Albany Managing Director Connie Cahill observes, "What these changes have really led to is better service to our clients- the right legal expertise focused on the right issues. We have always been known as a law firm that puts our clients' interests first and we now have even greater bench strength. As a result we can provide distinctive client service on more sophisticated cases and matters. Clients have seen even more value from us and, as a result, our practices grow even faster."

With great success comes an opportunity for even greater responsibility, and the leadership team at Hiscock & Barclay has identified innovative methods to accelerate professional development among its lawyers. When the firm recognized an uninspiring trend in the pro bono work and associate training by partners, the leadership team took a proactive approach to identifying a plausible solution. By implementing a compensation system that allowed attorneys to include pro bono and associate shadow training time into their billable hours, the firm saw a marked increase in attorney participation. "Not only were our lawyers able to work with individuals outside of their areas of expertise, but they also made a significant impact on their local communities," says Langan. An added bonus: "Our clients loved the idea that their attorneys were working together across specialty lines, building knowledge that would ultimately have a positive impact on their business with us, and shadow training associates on their matters with no charge to them."

The accolades extended beyond the firm. In 2010 Hiscock & Barclay was awarded the President's Pro Bono Service Award from the New York State Bar Association, a veritable coup for a midsize firm. Though the implementation of the compensation system involved a substantial financial investment on behalf of the firm's partners, the rewards have been immeasurable. "There



Photo by Charles Wainwright

has been tremendous value in our firm's morale," Langan reflects. "Some of our most significant wins have come from work by our lawyers on small and large pro bono cases."

Though their expansion arose from crisis, Hiscock & Barclay's phoenix-like ability has elevated business and attitudes throughout its offices. It started, says Langan, with passion for their work and a shared vision. "There is no greater gift to a leader than the opportunities presented by a crisis," he observes. "We are still running on the momentum that started over a decade ago, and look forward to continued growth and success throughout our practice areas."

Hiscock & Barclay continues its innovative approach as the firm explores opportunities to capitalize on emerging IP and energy issues. Attorneys for the firm are involved in high-profile issues such as the Marcellus Shale, and the Say Yes To Education program. Hiscock & Barclay also continues to develop client relationships throughout its Eastern regional platform, and sees potential for continued and thoughtful expansion. "We are really seeking a balanced platform that will best meet our clients' needs and interests," states Langan. "This is a fascinating time to be in the legal profession; so much is changing and so many great new opportunities continue to arise."