

BANKER & TRADESMAN

Natural World To Corporate World

By Jim Cronin – July 17, 2011



Legal careers can take attorneys in many directions. Take, for example, Joshua Bowman, a 37-year-old lawyer specializing in the representation of independent and franchised hotel owners. His clients include Jiten Hotel Management, Ocean Hospitality and the Newport Hotel Group.

But when Bowman was working with Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) in Colorado as a fresh-faced undergraduate, he wasn't visualizing a career crusading for corporate hospitality interests. Once he went down that path, though, he realized leases, foreclosures and other commercial real estate transactions were what he found most interesting about the law.

Joshua Bowman

Title: Partner, Sherin and Lodgen; Boston

Age: 38

Experience: 11 years

Q: Where did you think you'd end up when you were first starting out?

A: When I was at Colgate, I decided to take a year off and went to Boulder, Colo. and worked for Colorado PIRG on a nonprofit environmental law political campaign. It was focused on saving public trust lands – state lands that the state of Colorado was opening up for development. There are about three million acres of these lands that are very beautiful. I worked on a political referendum to change the constitution of the state so that these lands would be saved and ran the campaign as a field manager. I came back and went to law school at [Boston College] because they have a very good environmental and land use program. I had always felt like I wanted to do environmental and land use law. I clerked with the Department of the Interior for a year ... in a Newton office that covers Maine to Virginia, and did endangered species work and real estate work for the National Park Service.

Q: So how do you go from saving endangered species one day, to working for corporate clients the next?

A: When I was in Colorado I became friendly with a very interesting and entrepreneurial person. In my third year of law school, he called me and told me he was starting a company himself. It was an auditing consulting company and he asked me if I wanted to be his general counsel. But I was still very focused on environmental law and so I told him that I didn't think it was practical for me to go work with him. I told him that I had a job with Rackemann, Sawyer & Brewster as an environmental and land use associate, and I suggested that he become a client of this firm, and he became a client.

Q: What kinds of law were you working on for him? Did you enjoy the jump from defending the natural world to working in the auditing world?

A: It was a major departure for me because I thought I just wanted to focus on environmental issues. But I started working with him on a variety of corporate and transactional issues and just enjoyed the challenge of having my own practice. I did that for about a year, then slowly started realizing that I didn't really miss the environmental stuff that much.

Q: So how did the hotel deals come into play?

A: This company was really getting started ... and I didn't see it being 100 percent of my business anymore as it had been. Through luck, I met a hotel developer who had a pretty significant development project, a South Boston Courtyard by Marriott right by the South Bay Center. They needed some permitting help and I had some experience in that. I became very immersed in the businesses, and I realized that's the part of law that I love the most – working with clients that are very entrepreneurial and smart, but not institutional and not huge. I worked on that one hotel project for about two years, which was a very complicated permitting project. Then I transitioned into doing all of [Jiten Hotel Management's] commercial real estate work.

Q: What brought you to Sherin and Lodgen?

A: I needed more resources, as well as mentoring and tutelage, to be able to deal with things like securitized lending, complicated financing issues and joint ventures with publicly traded REITs, so I moved to Dionne & Gass, a boutique commercial real estate firm. I started representing small- to medium-sized, and sometime large, real estate companies. I ended up getting a \$120 million office transaction for Crosspoint Assoc. in 2007. They called me because they had the Thompson Reuters headquarters in Seaport Square, a 380,000-square-foot office portfolio. We closed that deal start to finish in six weeks. We had one day to get the [project notification forms] done. At the end of the first day, they said, 'We have three bidders lined up. If you can't get the purchase and sale agreement done in one day, we're going to give it to someone else.' We didn't get it done the first day, but we were close enough so that they gave us another day, so we got it done in the second day. Then I came to Sherin and Lodgen at the end of last September. I didn't want to be in a huge firm, but I needed a larger platform. There's back-end office support here in terms of accounting and bookkeeping that's very helpful to me at this point.

Bowman's Five Favorite Things About Being A Hospitality Lawyer:

1. Working with interesting clients. It takes a unique personality to own and/or operate a rental property where leases turn over daily. My clients include some of the most intelligent, hard-working people I've met.
2. I got a room in Boston for my parents 24 hours before Game Two of the 2007 World Series for \$99. Enough said.
3. Hotel transactions are seldom boring. Hotels involve unique franchising, permitting, labor and employment, and tax and business issues that make them more complicated – and more interesting – than most other real estate transactions.
4. Being part of a closely knit community of hotel service providers. There are a lot of good people working in the hospitality industry in Boston.
5. Traveling for work. Nothing beats going to Provincetown, the coast of Maine or New York City to close a deal.