

## Norton Rose Fulbright's US Chief Talks Firm's Stateside Expansion

By Lynn LaRowe

*Law360 (March 20, 2023, 3:35 PM EDT)* -- Since taking the helm of Norton Rose Fulbright's U.S. offices about three years ago, Jeff Cody has been busy overseeing the hiring of more than 50 lateral partners and a significant Midwest expansion while helping shepherd the firm through the pandemic.

But Cody still makes time every month to conduct three monthly video meetings — one with partners, a second with nonpartner lawyers and a third with nonattorney professionals at the firm. All are encouraged to ask questions as part of the firm's commitment to "people first," Cody told Law360 Pulse.

"It's an hour call, and I tell them about the finances and where the firm's going," Cody said. "We really work on transparency."



Jeff Cody

While Cody's four-year term doesn't expire for almost another year, the firm's partners reelected him in February to a second stint as U.S. managing partner, which begins Jan. 1, 2024. Cody said the idea behind the early election was to eliminate distraction over the question of his continued leadership so that the firm could focus on its real work.

"I had the sense that the partners were supportive of me continuing, so my strategy was, 'Let's just take that off the table right out at the beginning,'" Cody said. "No one is spending any time in '23 thinking about who that next leader may or may not be."

Cody took the reins of Norton Rose's U.S. operation on Jan. 1, 2020, just as the coronavirus pandemic began to tighten its grip on the country. He said its lingering influences "are profound."

"When we came into the pandemic, we had very limited remote working, [and] really overnight we learned how to do this," he said. "Back to our people-first approach, we started seeing the benefits of it in so many of our offices, especially in cities with an hour-plus commute one way. It's a big deal to them. They get two hours of their life back."

Norton Rose has more than 300 partners, 450 nonpartner lawyers and 800 business services personnel in the U.S., as well as practice coordinators and other employees supporting the firm's work.

Cody, who is based in Dallas, sat down with Law360 Pulse recently from an office in Chicago, which the

firm launched last year, to talk about the firm's strategy and future. His responses have been edited for length and clarity.

### **How has the firm incorporated the pandemic's transformation of where people work?**

We ask our partners to be in the office three or four days a week — more on the four-day side — so that they are there to lead, educate, teach, mentor and guide associates at the firm. Our associates who are on partner track, we ask for two days minimum but suggest they might want to come in more than that. But it's up to them.

For lawyers not on partner track — folks who are senior, skilled lawyers — we want them there one day a week for the firm's culture, and so they stay connected to the firm and the people. Our business services team, depending on their job function, can be fully remote.

It's tailored to [the employee's] situation. From the pandemic we learned that you've got to be flexible and nimble in how you react to your people if you want to keep them.

### **What practice areas are you focused on growing?**

There is not a single practice area we're not looking to grow. [But] I would say we're very focused on corporate mergers and acquisitions, private equity, and commercial litigation. We have a very strong presence in the M&A market. It's the heart and center of the business transactions community in the U.S. Being part of that is important from a revenue generation perspective and from a branding perspective.

The private equity market is also very lucrative. We're trying to build out our practice in that high-profile market, particularly in New York and Chicago.

Commercial litigation goes back to our roots at Fulbright & Jaworski [as trial lawyers]. We're always looking to build out and bring lawyers into that practice. It's a fairly easy sell when we start talking about the tradition and the success the group has had.

### **Can you talk about the firm's recent Midwest expansion?**

It sort of developed organically. We were looking for a [transaction]-based technology practice, and we found a group of lawyers in Chicago. Then we found a really good candidate in the project finance space there, and we knew it was time to make that play and go to Chicago.

That led to two really good additions in the labor and employment space, and then we found a group of real estate lawyers that was a perfect fit with project finance.

And now we're pushing 30 lawyers in Chicago. [The office opened in April 2022 with 11 attorneys.]

In Chicago, our innovation hub, we picked office space outside the traditional downtown in the Fulton Market district [that the firm will move into in May]. Google has a headquarters here. McDonald's has a headquarters here. So there's a lot of what people would see as more progressive corporate culture in Chicago at this site.

[In April 2022], we were talking to a group [of 11 attorneys] from Blackwell & Burke PA, a great trial

boutique firm in Minneapolis. They liked the traditional Fulbright & Jaworski reputation of trying cases.

By looking at our strengths and not worrying about location, we put together our Midwest strategy, which also includes St. Louis.

### **Can you talk about the firm's diversity efforts and their impact?**

If you asked me what I'm most proud of, I would say our diversity, equity and inclusion efforts at the firm. We created our racial equity council [to serve] our partners, nonpartner lawyers and business services people [who are Black]. We wanted to create an environment where they felt safe, accepted and able to be authentic.

That led to our sponsorship program, [which is] not a mentoring program. Sponsors sit down and talk to [individuals] and find out what they need. It's been a huge success.

We did such a good job branding the racial equity council that we've now created the minority equity council, which covers all other lawyers of color. We also have our women's initiative network and are creating a sponsorship program [for those groups] so that all our staff have a more level playing field.

It's starting to get around, [and] the number of diverse candidates we're seeing has ticked way up in our recruiting, whether it's female, lawyers of color or LGBTQ. Anecdotally we're seeing more LGBTQ candidates [who] self-identify, which demonstrates to me that they view our law firm as a place where they can be themselves. That's really what we're trying to push.

Our entry class coming this fall will be 50% lawyers of color — that's 25 out of 50.

### **Under your leadership, the firm has made more than 50 lateral hires. What makes partners want to join Norton Rose?**

We kind of go at it in two parts. The first is that there are only two or three truly elite global firms out there, and I think we are one of them. That's our footprint. We have 50-plus offices around the world with true depth, not just a satellite office, so we have an offering to clients that's difficult for a lot of firms to match.

We're working on transactions all the time [involving] not just a couple of jurisdictions, it might be 20, where [a client] is disposing of or acquiring assets.

The other thing that's a difference maker for us is our culture. We have a fairly elaborate interview process that gives lawyers a sense for who we are. We're people first, and we're looking for talented lawyers who fit with our ethics, our culture and our value system. When we find those lawyers we really try to bring them in.

### **What do you hope your biggest accomplishment will be as managing partner?**

This may sound a little corny, but [during the monthly calls with staff] I tell them that I want them to be proud of the firm. If they're proud of the firm, if they're happy, then I think we'll be tremendously successful in everything we do.

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