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‘Work within the system rather than fight it’

BY DAVID THOMAS

Law Bulletin staff writer

Kirkland & Ellis LLP partner Robert E. Goedert practices capital markets and securities law. The 36-year-old Harvard Law School graduate described his practice as an area that demands cooperation and compliance with the system.

More than five years ago, Goedert had to embrace principles of his practice in order to prevail in an entirely different — and personal — legal battle: A fight for the custody of his then-13-year-old sister-in-law, who had been placed in foster care in Minnesota.

In a written Q&A interview, Goedert talked about what he learned from that experience, how he uses those lessons today, and his life outside the office.

LB: How did you get involved with this practice of law?

RG: Dennis Myers, head of our capital markets group, is someone I greatly admire. I met him during on-campus recruiting, and after I started full-time he suggested I try working on an initial public offering. Then I tried a few more. I loved everything about how capital markets work — the mix of interpreting legal statutes, creative writing in

offering documents and general business advising — has always kept it interesting and fresh.

LB: You fought for your 13-year-old sister-in-law's custody when she was placed into foster care in Minnesota. How did your law practice prepare you for that legal fight?

RG: I'm a capital markets lawyer, not a litigator, and so my instinct was to work within the system rather than fight it.

My wife and I (we had only been married about a year at this point and were early in our careers) spent months cultivating relationships with my sister-in-law's caseworkers in Minnesota, convincing them that taking the unusual step of sending her out of state to live with us would be the right move.

Once they were on our side, they could interface with the judges, etc., far more effectively than we could. Then it was really a matter of managing the process, checking in with people, prodding when necessary, making sure the right forms were getting filed and boxes getting checked — pretty similar to my day job, really.

My wife and I also both spoke at the hearing, but I know that all the preparation and amazing work by the caseworkers before that is what carried the day.

LB: Similarly, did you learn



Robert E. Goedert

any lessons from the custody battle that you have since applied to your law practice?

RG: Kindness, patience and empathy go much further than yelling and posturing in getting a deal done. From the perspective of a deals lawyer, the custody process was excruciatingly slow, and all the while my sister-in-law was living in a double-wide trailer in temporary foster care.

But we had to keep our frustration, anger and concern in check and appreciate that the caseworkers have a much harder job than our own, in a much different world than we know. So we always stayed 100-percent positive when interacting with anyone in the system and, ultimately, I

think that carried the day.

I use this lesson every single day in approaching negotiations on my deals.

LB: What is your long-term career goal?

RG: Continue to grow and strengthen the Kirkland capital markets practice, in particular, by using the lessons I've learned and leveraging collegiality and civility to serve the end goals of our clients. I occupy a very small corner of the legal profession, but I intend to work to make it more collaborative and friendly.

LB: What is the first app you use when you wake up in the morning and look at your phone?

RG: Interval Timer. It's a fitness app I use to go through my morning exercise regime. If I can't get a workout in before the kids wake up, it doesn't happen. Lately that means waking up at 5 a.m.

LB: What TV show did you just finish binge-watching?

My wife works full-time at PricewaterhouseCoopers, and we just had our third child in June [ages 4, 2 and 2½ months], so there has not been much time for TV lately. The last series we watched was "Mozart in the Jungle." I enjoyed the reminder that other careers can be just as stressful as law.

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