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Q&A > department

Laura Personick

Age: 29

Education: She graduated from the University of Virginia in 2001, and the University of Chicago Law School in 2004.

Professional: A partner at McAndrews, Held & Malloy, she practices a broad range of intellectual property law, with an emphasis on patent and trademark litigation. She has worked with such diverse technologies as the software, electronics, and mechanics of barcode printers, orthopedic prosthetic devices, cryoablation medical devices, and nutraceutical compositions. Her practice focuses on assisting clients by litigating and helping to resolve IP disputes. She participates in all aspects of dispute resolution, from pre-litigation consultation to trial and appellate work.

1. Why did you become a lawyer?

I actually was a chemistry major in college, and I hadn't considered being a lawyer really up until I got interested in chemistry. And I knew I didn't want to be a doctor. I didn't really want to work in a lab. It's one of those things where you explore other options for what to do with your degree. I think my dad actually had mentioned patent law, so I started looking into that. I went to law school with the intention of being a patent attorney, not just a lawyer in general. ...

2. If you could have lunch with someone, living or dead, who would it be and why?

Thomas Jefferson.

I have to say that because I went to the University of Virginia, which is Mr. Jefferson's university. But I just find — knowing about him since I was a kid and going to his university and hearing all these stories — it would be so interesting to sit down with him because

I would love to hear from one of the founders their take on the stuff that's going on in law today, and the interpretations we've got of the Constitution, and the interpretations we've got of even the founders' ideas. ...

3. What is your favorite book, television show, movie or play about lawyers?

I just got hooked on the TV show, "Damages." It is addictive and I love it. My law career is nothing like any of the lawyers they show on there. I don't know of anyone's whose is. I can't say I particularly respect any of the lawyers I see on that show. But it is so fascinating and so interesting, and so well-written and surprising. And I really like how the characters are drawn up so it's not lawyers are good; lawyers are bad. It's just that these individual characters are so interesting.

4. What advice do you have for new or future lawyers?

My advice is, I think a lot of people feel some sense of competition with their peers maybe, or some sense that they really have to do it all on their own. I think one of the things that I love the most about being at McAndrews, and one of the things that drew me to it, is sort of the team atmosphere to law. A lot of people are on teams when they're doing litigation, but even then you hear about or you see this competitiveness within the team. ... It's really great to cultivate early on this comradeship with the people that you're working with because their ideas a lot of times will spark new ideas with you. Don't take it as such an individual profession.

5. What do you like the most and the least about being a lawyer?

What I like most is that you really get to be creative. I think a lot of times you find yourself in jobs where you are doing a task and then it's finished and done. It's a sort of an analytical approach. I like when you get a brief in, you think about it, you think about the answers to it, but you also think about creative, new approaches or new ways to see the law or interpret the law because you're coming at it from a side. You're an advocate. You know how this is supposed to be argued and you know how it's supposed to turn out. So you've got to work with what you've got, and creatively to make it work for you and your client.

What I like the least is probably I'm a fan and not a fan of billable hours. Probably I would say I like it the least out of what I'm doing because it's hard sometimes when you're working on multiple things to remember, "Oh, I have to switch over. I have to now switch over." It's a very regimented and controlled approach to timing your day. ...

6. What is your favorite Chicago restaurant?

I think the one I end up going to the most, and you probably don't get this one often, is Salt & Pepper Diner. It's right next to the theatre I perform at so we end up going there for dinner a lot, and I've gotten to know the menu very well. They have fantastic milk shakes. ...

7. What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

Well, there are two things I mainly do and they take up a lot of my time. I perform improv at IO Theatre up north and I've been doing that for, I've probably been at IO for five or six years now. And it's great, and I find myself spending so much of my free time there. I perform maybe once a week but then I go see shows. ... And the other thing is horseback riding. I have my own horse and I go see him probably three or four times a week because I can go after work and then on the weekends. And during the summer we do a lot of horse shows around Illinois. ... He's a new horse and he's only 4 years old. His name's Elliot.

8. What is the most important thing going on in the world or legal community today?

I know that one hot-button issue just for us in the legal world, and this is probably really specific to my field, is the patent reform that's going on right now.

There are new patent laws, and there's been a big movement to have some patent reform. It's a huge hot button for us because there's definitely different sides to it. There's a lot of academics pushing for restricting the number of patents that come out, especially in certain fields. They're pushing for some reform where in certain fields of technology they really create a different set of standards for getting a patent; make it much harder to get a patent in, say, a mechanical field than in a chemical field. There is a lot of debate going on about how to reform the patent system to sort of tighten it up and make stronger patents coming out. ■

By Olivia Clarke