



Next Gen



This week's Q&A with

Benjamin Sykes

At dinner parties, Chicago Partner [Ben Sykes](#), a member of Locke Lord's Regulatory and Transactional Insurance Practice Group, politely describes his profession along the lines of "I work on mergers and acquisitions in the insurance industry, as well as related regulatory issues." You can't imagine how quickly the other person changes the topic! In reality, his practice is quite diversified, from helping the newest InsurTech navigate licensure issues, to negotiating a half-billion-dollar loss portfolio transfer reinsurance transaction, to advising on complex joint-ventures between hospitals and insurance companies. He rarely has a dull day, despite what his dinner companions might think.



More About Ben

How did you know that you wanted to practice law? // What inspired you to become a lawyer?

I grew up on Moloka'i, a small rural island in Hawai'i, where water rights were almost more valuable than the land itself. My mom was a community organizer who worked hard to ensure Native Hawaiian homesteaders had priority over developers for those water rights. I spent a good chunk of my childhood sitting at the back of public meetings and administrative hearings, reading regulations and reviewing public testimony. One of the cases even made it all the way to the Supreme Court of Hawai'i, which ruled in our favor. To be honest, it would be more surprising if my brother and I didn't end up becoming lawyers despite having no lawyers in our family previously!

What has helped you to become successful in your field?

I attribute two personality aspects to my success within this space, especially on the transactional side — one innate, the other learned. First off, I'm a nice guy. There are some (rather successful) lawyers who are jerks, with some clients tolerating them under the theory of "yeah, but at least he's our jerk." That's never going to be me. I am going to find a way to get a deal done for my clients without posturing, histrionics or peacocking. This is good business for the client today, and you also never know who your client will be tomorrow.

The second aspect is the ability to grind. There's a reason companies call outside counsel at 4 p.m. and expect a fully revised reinsurance agreement by the next morning. You need to put in the work, hour after hour, minute after minute, no matter how brilliant a legal mind you have. It's no different than the lessons my cross country coach (go SPASH Panthers!) instilled in me in high school: If you want to succeed, you need to put in the work.

What drives or motivates you on your hardest days/during your most difficult matters?

Other than the giant shark Locke Lord keeps behind the desk of its attorneys to prevent them from leaving? Fear of being eaten alive is a pretty great motivator, but other than that, I would have to say it's the team atmosphere we have both within Locke Lord and with our clients. We are all in it together and working toward a common goal, and the hard times are actually some of the most memorable in retrospect. But really, it's the shark — he has some pretty sharp teeth.

If you could have dinner with one person, living or dead, who would it be and why?

This is going to sound really cheesy, but my wife and two daughters (3 and 5). Being so busy this past year, I have missed more family dinners than I'd like to admit. Any time I can get away to eat mac and cheese and chicken tenders and hear about all of their respective days, I'll take it over almost anything else.

Tell us your favorite book, movie or TV show and why you like it.

There's a great start to a poem in *The Hobbit* (the book, not the atrocious three-part movie) that I often keep in the back of my head:

All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.

What would be your fantasy career if you weren't a lawyer?

So, there's this little federal court house in Yosemite National Park. Each time I visit, I find it amazing that some lucky federal judge gets to live and work in Yosemite year-round. I guess I would still be a lawyer, but that would be my fantasy career, if only for the location! I can just imagine ordering a recess so that I could go do a quick run up the Mist Trail...



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