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Chad Poznansky

Business Background Guides His Insight in Closing Client Deals

by Dan Farnham

Chad M. Poznansky believes real estate attorneys can be deal makers or deal killers. Having a strong business sense is what separates the two, he says.

“A lot of lawyers can focus on the legal side, and that’s fine,” he says. “But there’s got to be a mix there as well, or else you’re missing out on a bunch of strategies that you can work on with your client.”

Poznansky, 35, is a member attorney with **Clark Hill PLC** in Chicago. He focuses his practice on commercial and residential real estate acquisitions and dispositions, including multi-family apartment buildings, condominium properties, vacant land, office buildings, shopping centers and hotels.

Poznansky says the most important attributes of a successful attorney are accessibility and trust with the client.

“I just don’t think you can be helpful to your clients if you’re not interfacing with them,” he says. “Lots of times that’s a big negative you hear of lawyers. That’s something I really focus on.”

Eric Weber, co-owner of 33 Realty, has

worked with him for the past eight years and can attest to his accessibility and quick replies to questions.

“You almost become accustomed to it,” he says. “When you don’t get that from other attorneys, you start to wonder what’s wrong. He makes me feel like I’m still a top client.”

Weber says Poznansky represents integrity, which he believes is a term used too loosely nowadays.

“It means honesty,” he says. “I’ve never been directed by Chad to take any litigious action that would benefit him more than me.”

Roots in Real Estate

Before he decided to become an attorney, Poznansky was a finance major at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with the idea that he would work in real estate. Between his junior and senior years, he was an intern for a commercial real estate brokerage company. Though he was offered a job at the end of the summer, he decided that being a real estate agent was not what he wanted to do.

“In the brokerage business, I figured it’s a sales position,” he says. “That’s not something I’m comfortable with, and that whole summer crossed out one of the things I had foreseen as a potential avenue.”

Back at school for his senior year, Poznansky started attending pre-law meetings and took a business law class.

“I went to a couple of seminars at Northwestern Law School over the fall and really started to think this was a way I could get into real estate and do it at a level that’s not just pounding on doors and trying to sell houses or sell retail buildings,” he says. “It was a winding road. It’s still a winding road, but that’s really when I saw the path to getting involved in real estate law.”

After receiving his bachelor’s in finance in 2003, Poznansky earned his law degree from DePaul University in 2006. He says his experience working in a commercial real estate office helps him better understand the business issues facing his clients.

“It’s important for me to know what my client’s trying to accomplish, how important this deal is for them and, as you work with clients more, you obviously know what’s important, what’s not,” he says. “I think the experience from before help me bring those out in the clients.”

Trial by Fire

Poznansky’s unique path continued with his first job in law at the firm Borek & Associates P.C. Founder Sam Borek, who has since died, was an attorney, entrepreneur and real estate developer. The firm served as a general counsel office for Borek’s business developments.

Poznansky knew Borek from childhood

in Morton Grove when he played sports with Borek’s sons. Remaining a family friend, Borek gave Poznansky his first experience in a law office right after he received his bachelor’s degree by allowing him to work as a general helper. After his first year in law school, Poznansky clerked at the firm.

“The ability to right off the bat be put in a position where I’m in direct contact with the decision maker at the company, which was Sam, was a unique opportunity,” he says. “It’s rare that a law clerk, right after the first year of law school, would be dealing with a decision maker. That kind of responsibility was important. Sam knew that throwing me into the fire right away would help grow me as an attorney.”

After graduating from law school, Poznansky became an associate at Borek’s firm with a focus on real estate and banking. The real estate market soon crashed. Borek had to lay off his more experienced attorneys; Poznansky and Borek were the only remaining members.

“It just gave me an unreal opportunity to learn from him and for him to teach me and to really, from just a year out of law school, be able to handle transactions from beginning to end with just oversight from the deal side,” he says.

One of the main lessons Poznansky learned was the importance of developing clients. Although he had not liked the prospect of being a salesperson interning at a real estate office, he now needed to sell himself and his services to grow his client base.

Borek challenged him by giving him a deadline to bring new clients to the firm.

“Just a couple years out of law school, he put me in a position where you’ve got to start making some things happen yourself,” Poznansky says. “That was scary. Not wanting to be on the sales side (of real estate) was not being a salesperson. Really, half of being a lawyer is being a salesperson if you want to develop a business.”

Social Connections

Poznansky says one of his favorite clients to work with is a friend from college, Matt Janko of Janko Properties. The two met as freshmen at the University of Illinois where they lived on the same dorm floor. When Janko started purchasing properties in 2009, he worked with Poznansky to close the deals.

“With him, there’s no reason to ever want to use anybody else,” Janko says. “We know how each other work. He knows the things I’m going to miss.”

Poznansky says he feels proud to have helped Janko grow his business to the point that it now owns about 1,500 properties across the country.

“He’s a great friend but also a great

client, and I think he has helped me get to where I am,” he says. “I think he would say I helped him get to where he is.”

Poznansky tries to become friends with his clients because he believes it builds the trust between them. To build friendships, he spends some of his own free time outside of work attending social events with clients.

“I feel like I do work a lot, but I don’t consider a lot of the marketing and networking efforts I make to be work,” he says. “Being able to become friends with your clients and take them to Hawks games or Bears games, that’s something I really like to do.”

When he does want to escape his work obligations, he spends time with his wife and three French bulldogs, which he says are like his kids.

Growing Leadership

Poznansky moved on to the firm Latimer Levay Fyock LLC in 2012, then joined Clark Hill in 2014 as one of the first members of its new real estate team.

“As my clients started to grow, I felt I needed to be in a place where I would have support around me from seasoned veterans in real estate but also in other areas of law,” he says.

Clark Hill has 12 offices in the United States, and its Chicago office finished a move to a larger space at Prudential Plaza in October 2016.

Ray Koenig, managing member of the Chicago office, says Poznansky was brought in to get the real estate group up and running in Chicago.

“Chad is a pleasure to work with because he’s very pragmatic and doesn’t waste a lot of time,” Koenig says. “He tends to get to the matter pretty quickly and gives you an understandable answer.”

Clark Hill moved into its new space in part because it plans to increase its staff. The real estate department has grown from two to five people in the two years Poznansky has worked there.

“In planning for the future, we took into consideration each group’s growth prospects in Chicago,” Koenig says. “I fully expect Chad will be a leader of the (real estate) group in Chicago. He has become a pretty good mentor to younger attorneys in the practice.”

Poznansky looks forward to taking a bigger leadership role with the firm as it grows.

“I think it’s an opportunity to help mold the group locally but also bring in people I think will be successful and help coach them up a little bit,” he says. “I think it’s exciting to think that in 10 years, we could have a nice 25-person group here and be able to have a hand in moving which direction that group goes.” ■