

Edelman's Focus

An Interview with Marty Edelman,
Senior of Counsel, Paul Hastings LLP

EDITORS' NOTE *Martin Edelman is of counsel in the firm's New York office. He has more than 30 years of experience and concentrates his practice on real estate and corporate mergers and acquisitions transactions. He has been an adviser to The Related Companies, Fisher Brothers, and Mubadala, the strategic investment entity of the Abu Dhabi Government, and is on the Board of Directors of Blackstone Mortgage, Equity Commonwealth, Advanced Micro Devices, and Aldar. He received his LL.B. from Columbia Law School and his A.B. from Princeton University.*



Marty Edelman

FIRM BRIEF *Founded in 1951, Paul Hastings LLP (paulhastings.com) has grown strategically to anticipate and respond to their clients' needs in markets across the globe. They have a strong presence throughout Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the U.S. Their innovative approach and unmatched client service has helped guide their journey to becoming one of the world's leading global law firms.*

How do you define what your focus is today?

I've probably had a career of ill-defined goals where I get up every day and believe something different is going to happen. In 1992, when I decided to move from being a partner in a law firm to being of counsel, I had a desire to step out of my comfort zone and find new things that would be challenging.

In 2002, I started my work in the Middle East and that has been an exciting challenge and opportunity, so I focus on the continuation of my law practice, my work in the Middle East, and the philanthropic projects I pursue.

On the law side, what has made the relationship of being of counsel with Paul Hastings work so well?

Two things – they were very willing to give me a lot of room and the high level of competence of the people who work with me.

Do you look more for expertise or personality fit in finding the right people?

There has to be a platform of intellect. One can't be a lawyer in a highly pressured real-estate environment like we have without a level of intellect.

However, much of it still has to do with personality. We have what I call a cult of civility.

The real estate legal profession for lawyers is known for combative personalities but we've developed an aggressive personality within the context of civility. We have been successful because we help get transactions completed as opposed to proving that our point has some moral certainty or religious value, and acting like it's not about a business deal.

Our view is very realistic, and is based on a belief that people, even with opposing points of view in a transaction, can work those differences out.

Is this a relationship business at day's end?

Yes and no. There are aspects of the legal business where one wants to go to the best person, period. Zoning or entitlements are a good reflection of that.

Most of the leaders in our industry have gotten comfortable with relying on a person as opposed to a law firm. They understand that it's going to be the law firm that works on the matter but they also want to know they can call that person and ask for advice or help.

It is relationship-based in the end because it's a matter of whose judgment one trusts when they're in a tough situation.

Will you touch on your work in the Middle East?

That developed in 2002. One of my friends was the Commanding General of American Forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. He visited the leaders of Arab countries every month. He felt there was an opportunity for me to create some important relationships and I accompanied him on some of his trips.

I met many of the leaders in the Middle Eastern countries. After overcoming a sense of "do I know what I am doing here," I ended up involved in a number of fascinating projects, particularly with the leadership in Abu Dhabi, which, along with the UAE are quite modern and enlightened within the context of their traditions. I also worked in Libya with Muammar Gaddafi's son who, at that time, was going to be the person to lead Libya towards the west.

I stopped working in Libya when the country literally blew up and focused on Abu Dhabi, for which I am involved in projects across many sectors such as international football – including the New York City Football Club in the MLS.

Did that early concern ease fairly quickly?

I am totally comfortable there. The group of people I work with are smart, loyal, balanced, and strongly committed to maintaining a coherent society, and to leading the fight against the Muslim brotherhood and ISIS. Abu Dhabi is a vital partner of the U.S. in the region. They're strongly determined to maintain the fabric of the Middle East.

Is it hard to be optimistic today with all that is going on in that region?

Yes. One of the biggest issues that the world isn't focusing on nearly enough is what is happening to the displaced people in the Middle East. There are somewhere around two million children under 19 years of age in the refugee camps in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon today. Some are hopeless, uneducated, and impoverished and, every day, ISIS is in those camps trying to convert these children into a world of Islamic Jihadism.

There is a new foundation that Gordon Brown, John Sexton, and I formed with support from a range of countries called the Catalyst Trust for Universal Education. We're focused on many fronts but especially on trying to do something to build proper education in the displaced person camps.

Are your philanthropic efforts more about what interests you or where you feel you can have the most impact?

Jackie Robinson was my first client. When he died, his widow and I started the Jackie Robinson Foundation, which is focused on scholarships for African American students.

We have young people in 39 different institutions throughout the U.S., and we have the highest graduation rate of any other philanthropy like ours because we have an extensive mentoring program.

The issue of racism in our country is far more significant today than we assumed it was five years ago, notwithstanding President Obama's efforts. The events happening in the cities with police and African American activists needs to be addressed in a fundamental way.

We assumed that, as a result of electing an African American president, racism was addressed and somewhat resolved as a force in our society. It was not and is not. This current election is highlighting the challenges we face. Serious open conversation needs to occur at every level of our society if we are to make real progress toward a unified America. ●