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Alumni Profile: Steven King – Ducks Unlimited

June 15, 2016

Steven King worked with Baker Donelson for six years as an associate in the Memphis office and is now the assistant general counsel for Ducks Unlimited (DU), a long-time client of the Firm. While a number of our attorneys keep up with Steven and work with him regularly, Jake Dickerson recently spoke with Steven about his time at Baker Donelson, how his experiences at the Firm prepared him for his current job at DU, and how Steven and the legal department balance protecting DU's interests, while at the same time not simply being the office of "no."

What do you enjoy most about your current job?
The ability to work constructively towards a common goal is the most rewarding part of my job as Assistant General Counsel at Ducks Unlimited (DU). Whether it is lobbying a state official, starting a new related company or working with the Board of Directors, the best part of my job is the reward of accomplishment.

What is the toughest thing about your job?
Navigating a business environment requires an in-house counsel to handle multiple personalities that do not always view difficult matters the same way. In order to avoid simply being the "Office of 'No,'" we have to try to balance risk and reward, which can be a challenge.

What's the secret to winning work from you?
Finding the sweet-spot is key: physical location, expertise and price all can come into play, depending on the matter. Business units will look to us to help identify an appropriate lawyer when outside counsel is needed. Am I aware of the expertise, and is the price right for the complexity of the work? Do I trust that my relationship attorney will make sure the work is pushed down to a lawyer at the most appropriate level?

How did working with the Firm help to shape your career?
My six years at Baker Donelson were the key to my career. I was able to handle a variety of litigation and construction matters which made me a perfect fit for my in-house counsel role at DU. Now I manage litigation and work with the conservation department on construction contracts and disputes; these responsibilities are directly analogous to my experience at Baker. But further than direct experience, the experience of working with clients, associates and shareholders at Baker Donelson allowed me to learn to deal with people in the business world, which is a key to success. Just like outside counsel, in-house attorneys are still service providers.

What is your advice to young lawyers just beginning their careers?
Expertise comes in (at least) two forms: technical expertise and emotional expertise. Work on both of those areas. Learn all you can about becoming a lawyer from a technical perspective, but also learn to deal with people and anticipate their needs, wants and motivations.

What do you do in your spare time?
Now that I have two children, I spend most of my free time with them. During what little free time I have, I snow ski, duck hunt, fish, play tennis, run or read. That sure makes it sound like I've got a lot of free time.

If you hadn't chosen this career path, what would you be doing?
If I hadn't become a lawyer, I think I'd be a chef, an architect, a history professor or a doctor.

Where do you enjoy traveling?
My wife and I love to travel. I'm pushing for Morocco or Peru for our next vacation.

Was there a particular reason you chose to work for Baker Donelson?
In my view, Baker Donelson was (and still is) the best law firm in Memphis. Once I received the offer, the only decision was really whether to move to Memphis or some other city. I greatly appreciate that Baker Donelson is dedicated to Memphis, particularly downtown.

Do you keep in touch with former colleagues?
Absolutely. Mary Ann Jackson, Bruce McMullen and others have helped me with matters at DU, and I regularly wander the halls of the office whenever I make it for a breakfast briefing or client meeting. Baker Donelson has done a great job of staying in touch with me, treating me as an alumni rather than a former employee.