

Donald T. Fox (LL.B. '56)

What is your area of specialization and how did you come to practice in this area?

My firm specializes in international business transactions.

NYU School of Law helped orient me in this direction by providing me with a Ford Foundation fellowship to participate in a summer seminar in Roman and Civil Law. Then the Chairman of the NYU French Department nominated me for a Fulbright Scholarship to the University of Paris, and I was able to live in that beautiful city and ultimately obtain two degrees in law from the University of Paris. This experience settled my international vocation.

What prompted you to open up your own firm? What were the greatest challenges you faced in doing so?

Almost forty years ago at the Cordozo lecture at the Association of the Bar of New York City, the late Judge Bernard Botein foresaw an increasing concentration in American economic life. He predicted that most lawyers would become employees of the government, or large corporations, or large law firms. I believed that this would create great peril for the integrity of the profession. Since I was then working for one of the best of the large law firms, I recognized the reality of what someone recently has denominated the "tipping point"-the size at which an organization loses its capacity to promote creativity and sound interpersonal relationships. In my interest and that of the profession, I set out to avoid this peril by founding a small corporate law firm that could strive for excellence and collegiality.

How has firm life evolved in the 50 years you have been practicing?

I believe Judge Botein was prescient in his observation of tendencies in the legal profession, which today is dominated by mega-firms with many offices in the United States and abroad through which their large corporate clients are rotated. Typically, the lawyers in these firms are specialists who rarely attain the breadth of experience to have the good judgment necessary to counsel and guide clients in accordance with the high ideals of the profession. My own firm has grown but has not reached that "tipping point." As long as I am able to influence its growth, the firm will remain independent and continue to seek excellence with collegiality prevailing among its members.

You have been very active in international legal issues over the course of your career - beginning with two law degrees from the University of Paris and continuing on with missions to various countries resulting in written reports of human rights abuses. Where did this interest in international law come from?

My interest in international human rights came from observing the abuses of arbitrary power that occurred, particularly in Latin America. I began to research ways of involving international law and international institutions in the protection of persons oppressed by their own governments. I began publishing my ideas in the *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics*. My initial article, published in Volume 1 No.1 of 1968, was entitled "Doctrinal Development in the Americas: From non-intervention to collective support for human rights." I continued to work on committees of bar associations and of the American Society of International Law. Then I became active in the work of the International Commission of Jurists and was elected chairman of the United States section following the retirement of Eli Whitney Debevoise.

What is your favorite memory from your time at the Law School?

I read attentively Marcel Proust's *À La Recherche du Temps Perdu*, which gave me great respect for the role of memory. However, I have not had the time to develop my own memories. Perhaps if I were to retire from the practice of law, I would try to find the time.

How did your education at NYU School of Law prepare you for the career that you have had?

NYU School of Law gave me the opportunity to increase my understanding of the law and respect for the legal scholars who devoted their lives to research and teaching. Through my work with the Alumni Association, I was able to know many generations of Law School graduates and to learn from their diverse experiences.

What was your first job after law school and what was the most valuable thing you learned there?

My first post-law school involvement was with the City of Paris , where I learned the importance of enjoying life. My first paying jobs were as an instructor in Comparative Law, where I came to realize that I did not have the patience to become a first-rate legal scholar, and with a large law firm where I learned that I could not be a cog in someone else's machine.

What advice would you give to current students?

I would never voluntarily proffer advice to students. However, if one were to ask with reasonable seriousness, I would reply: "Work hard, and do not forget that your career is not equivalent to your life."

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