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Success Magazine: How do you measure success?

Martin Finn: As a firm I think we measure success by satisfied clients. It's best measured by how well we solve our clients' problems and needs – we have to be timely with a quality, cost-efficient work product. Most importantly, we need to leave our clients better off for having worked with us.

SM: Why did you choose Siena College? What was the deciding factor?

MF: I had no idea where I wanted to go to college or what I wanted to do (who does at age 18?) so I asked my father for some advice. Because he was a happy alumnus of Siena, he recommended that I check it out myself. He suggested I get an accounting degree and then take it to the next level and go to law school. It was as easy as that. Because I valued my dad's opinion (and because I had no better idea) it was a no brainer for me to choose Siena.

SM: Do you keep in touch with any friends you made while you were there? How have those connections played into your adult life?

MF: One of the nicest things about being a Siena grad working in the Capital District is that we are all over the place. I do keep in touch with friends from college and actually do business with some of them. It's always helpful when you're out prospecting potential clients or employees and run into a Siena grad. There's an instant connection that really means something to both parties.

SM: Why was it important for you to start your own law practice?

MF: Seventeen years ago my partner, John Lavelle, and I had the idea that we could start a tax law practice that based

its success on being responsive to clients and putting them first. That was the entire basis of our marketing at the firm's inception and it turned out to be so successful an ethic that it's still in place today.

SM: Why did you choose to start a tax and estate planning firm? Were you responding to a market need, or following your life's dream?

MF: At the time we really thought we were responding to a market need, having both worked in accounting firms for several years and encountered attorneys on a regular basis. We thought that there was a need for a boutique law practice in these specialties and we felt that the marriage of both disciplines could be a viable one. It turned out to be a pretty good decision.

SM: Why is your practice so successful?

MF: I really believe that our practice is successful because we are responsive to our clients' needs first and foremost. Not only do we come up with quality solutions, but we do it quickly, efficiently and respectfully. We call our clients back in a timely manner, we get the job done in a timely manner, and we do it at a cost that is appropriate for the job. We can talk to our clients on their level, avoiding technical jargon that they may not understand. We try very hard to understand their issues and make appropriate suggestions for solutions. I think it's this level of client care that separates us – our clients are our first concern.

SM: What accomplishment are you most proud of?

MF: I'm definitely proud of starting this practice. John, a couple of dedicated employees, and myself grew it from basically nothing to the firm it is today. It's been a great ride and a wonderfully instructive experience. You learn a lot about yourself when your name is on the door, and when you have to scratch and claw your way to generate revenues to pay the rent and buy food.

SM: How has your practice changed since 1991?

MF: Most importantly, we were very small when we started. Now we're up to about 30 professional staff. We have a terrific core of attorneys, paralegals, and administrative staff that I would stack up against any other firm in the area. We're a very close knit bunch and work incredibly well together. Our practice areas have changed a bit over time as well. While we started with a practice focused primarily on tax counseling and compliance, our core practice areas have really become estate planning and administration, including elder law, and business counseling and transactions.

SM: You were the recipient of the Father Benjamin Kuhn award in 2005 for your contributions to Siena College. Why is it so important for you to give back to your alma mater?

MF: Most of my community service work began as an effort to get my name out in the community at a time when we were a grassroots practice. Over the years, however, it's become much more important to me personally to give back to Siena. It provided me with a quality education that has allowed me to be successful in my business and in my personal life as well. I learned many values while at Siena that I have been able to carry with me throughout my adult life and am now able to instill in my four sons.

SM: You are a new member of the Schenectady County legislature. What are your goals as the new District 3 Representative?

MF: This position is really an extension of my past community involvement, only at a different level. One issue that I'm definitely interested in is the concerns of our senior citizens in Schenectady County. A major aspect of my law practice is dealing with seniors and the various legal and financial issues that they encounter as they age. I want to see what I can do on a county level to help their milestone transitions be a bit easier. The business community also makes up a large portion of my client base and so their issues become my issues.

SM: What do you appreciate most about the Capital Region?

MF: I think one of the most important and interesting things about this region is the talent level of the people who live here. We've got a great pool to choose from for our employees. It's partially due to the excellent colleges, universities, and school districts in the area, but it also has a lot to do with the character of the students coming out of school.

SM: You are teaching Estate Planning II at Albany Law School. Is this your first experience teaching the law? What motivated your decision to teach?

MF: I actually have taught at several schools in the area over the years (including Siena) and my partner and I do a fair amount of continuing education presentations. Teaching keeps me sharp in my practice areas and is great marketing for the practice. But mostly I do it because I really enjoy being "on stage." I like talking to groups of people and get a real kick out of sharing what I know.

Teaching at the graduate level satisfies my need to "perform" while allowing me to share my knowledge of the law and sharpen my own knowledge bank.

SM: You are practicing law, helping manage your law practice, teaching and co-authoring many publications. Is it difficult for you to find a balance in life?

MF: Sometimes it is difficult to balance everything – to be an engaged, productive, and knowledgeable business owner and to be a good parent, husband and neighbor. It can be tough at times. Fortunately, at our firm we believe that our marketing and networking efforts within the community

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should be done in a manner that will flow seamlessly into our personal lives. For example, if Joe is a coach of his son's little league team, then we will sponsor the team. This allows Joe to not only market for the firm, but to do it in a way that lets him be at every one of his kid's games. It's a win-win situation and it helps all of our employees balance their personal and business lives.

SM: How do you maintain a positive outlook when you are faced with adversity?

MF: You just keep plugging away and wait for things to change. No matter what bad things might happen to trip you up along the way, it's eventually going to change if you keep going. Slow and steady wins the race.

SM: You enjoy running - why is this your pastime of choice?

MF: Interestingly, slow and steady also defines my running style! I do enjoy being outside and it's the easiest type of exercise for me. I like to be out and about in the neighborhood enjoying the fresh air. It's not so much about the running as it is about the "doing."

SM: Does running help you to digest your busy schedule?

MF: It does. Running gives me the opportunity to think when I'm not under the pressures of work and family. I try to organize my life as I run and I usually finish feeling a lot better about things.

SM: What future aspirations do you have?

MF: Well, when I "grow up" I still want to be teaching – and learning. I do enjoy practicing law and managing a law practice (most of the time!). I particularly enjoy working with and mentoring some of our paralegals and younger attorneys, so I'd like to be able to continue to offer my take on things for them in the future. All in all, things are in a pretty good place for me right now, so I guess wishing for anything more than continued contentment would be asking for a lot. Things are good.

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