



New Wiggin And Dana Leader Braces For Competition

Trusts and estates partner will manage the firm from New York

By DOUGLAS S. MALAN

As Wiggin and Dana's new managing partner, Robert W. Benjamin said he's ready to shake up the old thinking of how law firm business is conducted.

This is a time when firms the size of Wiggin and Dana (135 lawyers) can get the upper-hand when it comes to competing for business, Benjamin said, and it's time to consider something other than billable hours to cater to clients who want lower rates and the ability to budget their legal costs more accurately.

"We're exploring alternative billing concepts," said Benjamin, who was named managing partner of the firm, originally based in New Haven, earlier this month. "I think clients want to see alternatives, and we have to be more creative than relying solely on the billable hour. The more we talk about it as a group [of lawyers and clients], the more interest we're hearing."

That's life as a managing partner in 2009 when law firms no longer can just sit back and expect business to flow in. After all, the rough economy led Wiggin and Dana to cut 14 lawyers firmwide last winter.

"I think competition for clients is going to increase," Benjamin noted. "I'm getting the sense that companies are doing more shopping around. We can't assume that any of our longtime clients will stay with us just because we're Wiggin and Dana."

Benjamin has experience with alternative billing in his own New York-based trusts and estates practice where he has offered fixed prices for couples seeking wills and drafted agreements where part of his

payment in major probate litigation depends on his success with the case.

Adjusting the way the firm thinks about billing clients offers "an opportunity to get more business from people who are not happy" with their current lawyers.

Benjamin has hit the ground running in his new role, much as he has done since joining Wiggin and Dana in 2003 when his old firm, New York-based Howe & Addington, merged to create Wiggin and Dana's Manhattan office.

Benjamin soon became Wiggin and Dana's hiring partner and also joined the firm's executive committee. Wiggin and Dana now has offices in New Haven, Hartford, Stamford, Philadelphia and New York.

India Practice

Benjamin replaces Maureen Weaver, who spent seven years on the executive committee and a three-year term as managing partner of one of the largest firms based in Connecticut. Weaver will return to her practice as chair of the firm's health care department, which has been the source of significant mergers and acquisitions and financing work this year, Benjamin noted.

From 2003 until April of this year, Benjamin's role as hiring partner placed him at the forefront of the firm's growth in various practice areas through lateral hiring. Wiggin and Dana brought on about 20 lateral



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New managing partner Robert W. Benjamin says 'we can't assume that any of our longtime clients will stay with us just because we're Wiggin and Dana.'

partners in that time, Benjamin said, and created a practice area focused on business in India while also adding to the firm's rosters in white-collar criminal defense, trusts and estates and corporate litigation.

Benjamin said those practice areas, along with pharmaceutical product liability and biotech, have led to a lot of work for litigators and those working on financing deals.

"The economy has been difficult on everyone, but people are starting to think positively again," Benjamin said. "We're cautiously optimistic." ■