

TWENTY QUESTIONS FOR THE WORKERS' COMPENSATION PRACTITIONER

1. *Describe any childhood or non-law experiences which have affected your practice.*

Growing up, there were several family friends who were lawyers, and I think the respect that my family had for them was something that never left me. Also, being the big brother to my three younger brothers probably influenced my decisions to a great degree, because even though I'd never heard of a mediator, I certainly spent a lot of time performing the duties of one.

2. *When did you first know that you would be a lawyer someday?*

During my high school years I was on the debating team and I think that is where I was first exposed to the nuance of legalistic arguments. I also had an interest and fascination with Boston politics, and I think that gave me a natural pathway to the law (even though the pathway for some of the politicians led to jail).

3. *What was your undergraduate degree and how has it helped you in your practice?*

I graduated from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst with a degree in political science. Also during those years, I was in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) and I knew that I would practice law during my four-year Army commitment.

4. *What are your memories of law school?*

I spent three years in Vanderbilt Law School in Nashville, Tennessee. During my first year I was absolutely overwhelmed, drowning not only in my efforts to adapt to the culture of the South, but also in the intensity of law school. After surviving that year, the remainder of my years at Vanderbilt were devoted to actually learning the law. After Vanderbilt, I obtained a Masters in Law at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. This was during my Army years where I was an appellate lawyer assigned to the Pentagon. Man, those were the years.

5. *What was the nature of your practice before you went into a workers' compensation practice and how has it helped you in the latter practice?*

When I first came to Colorado I spent a year in a corporate practice with Chevron Oil Company. I followed that with a small firm, general practice, under Bill Myrick, Esq., who mentored me into a "take charge of the issues" format.

6. *How did you get involved in workers' compensation?*

As with most developments in life, one finds what feels right and good. I think that without even realizing it, I was seeking a practice where I could do the most good for the most needy of clients. For me, that facet of the law was workers' compensation practice.

7. *What is the breadth of your experience in workers' compensation (years of experience, number of cases handled, types of clients, etc.)?*

Over the past 40 years of work comp practice there have been lots of developments. The days of State Fund produced 20 minute hearings against lawyers like Pete Watson. Norton Frickey seemed to be in every courtroom at once. (Janet was in kindergarten, of course).

John Carroll was making laws and history in the legislature, while Tom Korson and Paul Conaway were some of the new lawyers handling work comp cases.

Now, with the establishment of WCEA as an advocate for claimants and powerful defense firms dedicated to the interests of carriers, the process is quite different from the "Good Old Days" of comp.

8. *With what firms/organizations have you practiced in your law career?*

I started as a sole practitioner in Boston, Massachusetts, with little taste for the practice. I came to Denver in 1974 as general counsel for Chevron Oil Company. (I am sure that my body is made up mostly of water, because Chevron and I certainly didn't mix.) The following year I joined Bill Myrick in what was to become Myrick, Newton and Sullivan until 1982, when my brother, Kerry, and I started a firm soon to be joined by Pete McGuire, our "adopted brother" and we now practice as Sullivan Sullivan and McGuire, P.C.

9. *Describe your activities in the workers' compensation arena.*

I am very proud of my volunteer work with the WCEA and PWC. I served as president of each of these fine organizations and have been on the boards of them as well.

The Professionals in Workers' Compensation organization has rewarded me with its designation as outstanding claimants' attorney and the Colorado Bar Association's workers' compensation section has given me the Lance Butler Award for service to the community.

Over the years I have received recognition as a workers' compensation Super Lawyer for five consecutive years. That is enough to make any lawyer proud.

10. *Describe your activities outside of work.*

Baseball and my family are the two loves of my life, but our clients' cases will be with me always. I love the fact that I am still in touch with and still socialize with clients and lawyers from decades ago.

11. *What have you found rewarding about workers' compensation practice?*

I know how corny this sounds, but it is not just meeting our needy clients, but the final handshake from a satisfied client that keeps me at the practice.

12. *What have you found challenging about workers' compensation practice?*

Some of the best lawyers in the state fight it out on both sides of workers' compensation cases, and I think that it is that quality level of attorneys that keeps all sides on the edge of their best game.

13. *Describe your perceptions about how the practice has changed since you first entered the workers' compensation practice.*

It is sad to observe that the fights between the sides in workers' compensation cases have escalated to wars. Lawyers on both sides should appreciate the fact that it is a true compliment to one's legal ability to be known as a reasonable, easy to deal with attorney who is open to negotiation.

14. *What do you think are the greatest challenges to the workers' compensation system currently?*

Just as extremely partisan politics is a threat to the political system, the "winning at all cost" attitudes of some workers' compensation lawyers is jeopardizing the practice and compromising the standards of some attorneys. We need to get away from the new cut-throat style of practice that seems to have been adopted by some lawyers.

15. *If you were "the boss of all things comp," how would you change the system?*

I would like to return to the avowed purpose of the workers' compensation system in our state: ". . . Assure the quick and efficient delivery of disability and medical benefits to injured workers . . ." (C.R.S. 8-40-102)

16. *What advice would you give law school graduates today about the practice of law generally?*

Develop your own standards and then go and represent your client in a way that allows you to sleep at night. It should not be all important for the lawyer to win every case. Sometimes the facts just don't allow that. To paraphrase the country song, "Know when to hold 'em, know when to settle them." Also, lawyers need to spend some time educating their clients about what winning the case actually means.

17. *What advice would you give an attorney just entering workers' compensation practice?*

Without losing any of your own personality, adopt the style of an attorney you admire. Don't just go with the most well-known or "successful" lawyer, but someone with whom you would like to be associated.

18. *What advice would you give seasoned workers' compensation practitioners?*

Now that I am a seasoned practitioner, I can say to others, "Relax and assess your years of practice: Are you proud of your reputation with other lawyers, particularly your opponents?"

19. *What are your passions currently?*

They are now as they always have been – my family. My wife, Sandy, my wonderful children, Joseph and Joan Marie. This goes back to an earlier question about assessing your life.

20. *What do you hope people will say about your contribution in the workers' compensation arena?*

Well, Greg, you threw me a middle-of-the-plate fast ball for this last question, didn't you? I hope that lawyers, judges and clients will use terms like trustworthy, fair, dedicated to his clients and to the practice of law. It would also be nice if they mentioned "Damned Good Lawyer" as well.