

Bob and Brian Sodikoff of Aronberg Goldgehn Davis & Garmisa and Katten Muchin Rosenman in Chicago



From left: Brian Sodikoff, Bob Sodikoff

By Paul Dailing

A few years ago, Robert N. Sodikoff of **Aronberg Goldgehn Davis & Garmisa** started asking around about his son.

His son, Brian Sodikoff, now a partner at **Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP**, had just begun his own legal practice a few years earlier. The elder Sodikoff checked in with a few lawyers he knew at the firm where his son was then working to see if Brian “was doing OK.”

The word that came back was a relief, but not a surprise to the proud father.

“The word that came back was, ‘Your son’s a superstar. He gets it,’” Bob Sodikoff says.

Father-and-son lawyers Bob and Brian Sodikoff have each found their way in the diverse practice of law. They both practice in downtown Chicago, about a mile apart from each other, but in different areas and in different-sized firms.

Bob Sodikoff practices in real estate law at the mid-sized firm Aronberg Goldgehn, a legal mainstay with roots in Chicago going back to 1892.

His son Brian is in IP law

with Katten Muchin, which since forming in Chicago in 1974 now has more than 600 attorneys in locations ranging from the United States to Shanghai.

Different firms, different areas of law, different focuses for father and son, but the two say the main legal lesson is the same: Be there for the client, always.

There are other lessons passed between the father and son, lessons on life, family and just surviving and thriving in the modern legal landscape.

“I rely on him for advice, especially with navigating the law firm. There’s a certain skill involved with that,” the younger Sodikoff says.

One lesson Brian Sodikoff took from his father was that the attorney-client relationship is a sacred trust, not one to be taken lightly. Bob Sodikoff taught this not only in words, but in his actions. Cases were never discussed in the Sodikoff home.

The conscientious Bob Sodikoff wouldn’t even discuss those casual conversations every lawyer experiences when a friend wants legal advice.

“If one of my friends called him for something, my friend

would tell me, not my father,” Brian Sodikoff says. “That really cemented for me that you’re in a position of trust.”

Like Father...

Bob Sodikoff was born on Chicago’s Northwest Side, one of three children. His father ran small businesses, such as a laundry and a series of gas stations.

Law was always on Sodikoff’s radar, even when he was a child. He knew what he wanted to do from a young age and never wanted to do anything else.

“I liked the idea of being a professional,” he says.

He graduated *cum laude* from Northwestern University School of Law in 1973. At the time, he was mainly interested in the registration of public companies with the Securities and Exchange Commission. Like many other young lawyers, his first few years of practice sent him down a different path than the one he had anticipated.

He interviewed at two firms: a firm in Philadelphia and Aronberg Goldgehn in Chicago.

He accepted a position with the latter, staying with and helping guide the firm over the last 43 years.

Brian Sodikoff always admired the relationships his father was able to build in the mid-sized firm environment. The elder Sodikoff developed many professional and personal relationships with people and companies who would stay with him for transaction after transaction over decades.

“It’s beyond clients,” Brian Sodikoff says.

Starting at the then-small Aronberg Goldgehn — he was either the 13th or 14th attorney at the firm at the time, he recalls — Bob Sodikoff was able to handle a wide variety of cases from the start. Not only did his practice include the SEC work he envisioned for his career, but he also handled cases relating to labor law, mergers and acquisitions, tax law and real estate.

“That’s the way it was at small firms back in ’73,” Bob Sodikoff says.

Eventually, his practice gravitated toward corporate and real estate law matters. He currently co-chairs the Real Estate Group at Aronberg Goldgehn, helping his clients with asset-based and real estate financing issues. His client list runs the gamut from New York Stock Exchange-traded companies to physicians setting up small practices.

He also serves as general counsel for several clients, advising them on general corporate matters such as shareholder agreements, asset and stock sales, consulting arrangements and purchase agreements. It’s a diverse practice that suits the elder Sodikoff nicely.

Although he put in the traditional long hours of a starting associate in his early days, Bob Sodikoff was able to find a balance between work and family by the time his son was born, Brian recalls.

“I don’t remember him not being around,” Brian Sodikoff says. “We would always joke that he walked in the house at 6:08.”

But Bob Sodikoff wasn’t

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just balancing work and family. His juggling act was work, family and community.

Starting in 1990, Bob Sodikoff became involved in the village government of Burr Ridge, where the family has lived since Brian was a child. Bob served on the Planning and Zoning Commission for nine years before getting elected to the village board. He even served as acting village president to fill a vacancy from December 2012 to May 2013.

Bob Sodikoff says his local government work was a chance to put the skills he honed in real estate law to use helping the community where he raised his family prosper and grow.

"You're dealing with people, property, government — and all those things were of interest to me," Bob Sodikoff says.

Like Son

Brian Sodikoff's path to the law wasn't determined from childhood like his father's had been. The younger Sodikoff wasn't as certain as to where he would wind up, and the path to law included stops at the human nervous system and corn futures.

He studied psychology with a concentration in neuroscience at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, graduating in 1999. He considered medical school, but after graduation took a job in a completely different field.

He started as a live trader at the Chicago Board of Trade. He had been looking only for a job to see him through the summer, but then got hired full-time. It turned out to be an exciting place for a young prob-

lem-solver to work.

His first job at the Chicago Board of Trade was as a clerk in the corn pit.

"It was back in the old days when you were right in the pit," Brian Sodikoff recalls. "The yelling, the buying, the selling, the calculating right on the fly."

That was where he wanted to be, down in the pit, in the thick of commerce and finance at its purest, not "upstairs, staring at a computer module."

Unfortunately, the industry had different plans. As computerized trading closed pit after pit around the world, Brian Sodikoff, less than a year into his new position, started mulling his professional options.

"Just the feeling in the air was that live trading was dying," Brian Sodikoff says.

He decided to go to law school. He attended DePaul University College of Law, graduating in 2003, 30 years after his father graduated from Northwestern. The science courses Brian Sodikoff took studying neuroscience at Vanderbilt would later qualify him for the patent bar.

Although law was a career shift, he excelled from the start, graduating *summa cum laude*. Brian Sodikoff says his father impressed upon him the importance of doing well in law school, particularly at a time in the industry when there are often more young lawyers than entry level jobs.

"You've really got to get in the top 10 percent [of the class]," Brian Sodikoff recalls his father telling him at the time.

Unlike his father, the younger Sodikoff went into intellectual property law.

He's the national co-head of Katten Muchin's Patent Litigation group, advising clients on patent, trademark, copyright and trade secret matters with a particular focus in the pharmaceutical industry.

Brian Sodikoff also heads Katten Muchin's Chicago office's IP pro bono group, advising digital start-up companies on patent matters at the 1871 business incubator in downtown Chicago's historic Merchandise Mart.

Analytical thinking, problem-solving, taking a complicated technical problem and looking for a solution others might not have seen — these are all skills that the young trader felt would transfer to the practice of IP law.

He was right, he says.

And now Brian Sodikoff is the one balancing work and family. He is married and has three children, ages 5, 3 and 1. He says he wants to be around for his children the way his father was around for him.

Although he's still in the portion of his career where, superstar or not, he's building his practice, the ability to Skype with clients from home or answer email on his phone has made it easier for younger lawyers not to be strangers to their own children.

"We work a lot of hours, but with technology, we can be a lot more flexible," he says.