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Lawyer Leaves Second Firm In a Month

Conflicts Force Wandering Lateral To Keep Trying

‘A No-Brainer’

By Drew Combs

Daily Journal Staff Writer

It took him more than 20 years, but Bruce G. Vanyo built one of the West Coast's premier securities litigation practices at Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati. But after he built it and large public companies came to seek out the firm's service, Vanyo has not been quite sure what to do next.

Two years ago, Vanyo decided to leave the firm and join the Redwood Shores office of Weil Gotshal & Manges, but after further thought, which took about a month, the star securities litigator decided to stay put.

In February, Vanyo tried again and joined the Los Angeles office of Chicago-based Kirkland & Ellis.

Ruled Dead

But the former football player's lateral attempt has again been ruled dead. Conflicts forced Vanyo to resign from the Kirkland & Ellis partnership on Tuesday.

This time, though, Vanyo isn't heading back to Wilson Sonsini. He will join the Los Angeles office of another Chicago-based firm: Katten Muchin Rosenman.

"It was a no-brainer," said Vanyo of joining Katten Muchin. "I didn't have to think twice because they already have a well-established securities litigation practice team."

‘Impossible to Resist’

At Katten Muchin, Vanyo will join the firm's board of directors and serve as co-chair of the securities litigation practice.

"Our firm has a very strong securities litigation practice, and we have been trying to grow that practice along with our white-collar defense practice," said Vincent A.F. Sergi, chairman of Katten Muchin. "When we got the opportunity to speak to Bruce, it was impossible to resist going after him."

The opportunity arose after he departed Kirkland & Ellis a month into his tenure.

"Kirkland & Ellis is a big firm, and there are conflicts that didn't surface until I was there," said Vanyo in a telephone interview Wednesday from Katten Muchin's Chicago headquarters, where he was completing the deal to join the firm.

Vanyo refused to discuss in detail the conflicts that unexpectedly arose at Kirkland & Ellis, due to "attorney-client confidence," but said, "There wasn't any fault. It just came up."

His clients have included Krispy Kreme Doughnuts, Dell Computer Corp., Boeing Co., Fluor Corp. and Sun Microsystems Inc.

"We try our best to avoid these things, but sometimes they still happen," said Robert G. Krupka, a Los Angeles-based Kirkland & Ellis partner. "We continue to hold Bruce in the highest professional regard and wish him the best of luck."

Vanyo originally did not consider Katten Muchin when he joined Kirkland & Ellis because "[Katten Muchin] have such a strong presence in this area," he said, "I figured they wouldn't need me."

This time around, Vanyo was aware of Katten Muchin's possible interest because of a conversation he had a few weeks ago with David H. Kistenbroker, who was then sole head of Katten Muchin's securities

litigation practice.

"Any major law firm can always add to its scale and size in a core practice area, and securities litigation is one of our core practice areas," said Kistenbroker, who now shares the title of co-head of securities litigation with Vanyo.

"He adds to the depth and breath of our practice," Kistenbroker added.

Katten Muchin also saw benefits in having Vanyo in its Los Angeles office, which staffs 67 attorneys, of which 31 are litigators.

"A large number of securities cases are filed on the West Coast," said Sergi, "so for us to now have this capability on the West Coast is very important."

Although the emergence of conflicts following the completion of a lateral move are rare, they are not unheard of.

In January, James Pooley, a partner at Milbank Tweed Hadley & McCloy's Silicon Valley office, announced that he was joining Morrison & Foerster, but conflicts have prevented the intellectual property litigator and trade-secrets expert from immediately joining the Morrison partnership. In the meantime, Pooley remains in his corner office at Milbank but is working under the firm name of Pooley & Oliver. Though MoFo is literally next door, he doesn't expect to make the formal move until summer.

Both Vanyo and Sergi said that even though the courtship was brief, a very thorough conflicts check was performed before the deal was completed. Larry Watanabe of Watanabe Nason & Seltzer in San Diego brokered both of Vanyo's recent moves.

"Hopefully, I will not be making such an announcement ever again in my career," Vanyo said.