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CORPORATE LADDER

Willis Goldsmith

Taking over legal pad

Chief of Jones Day's NY office
aims to grow in tight times,
readies Supreme Court debut

BY HILARY POTKEWITZ

AS AN EAGER ASSOCIATE AT HIS first law firm job in Washington, D.C., Willis Goldsmith was entrusted with preparing an injunction for an important case. Time was of the essence, and he raced over to the courthouse to deliver his documents.

When the court clerk asked him for the filing fee, it took a moment for the question to register.

"I had everything I needed to file, except one thing," recalls Mr. Goldsmith. He had no cash and was forced to slink back to the office to ask a partner for a check.

Humbled by his rookie mistake, he learned early on that details can make or break a case. Decades later, Mr. Goldsmith—the new partner in charge of the New York office for 2,300-lawyer Jones Day—is going over the final details of a much bigger case: He's scheduled to argue before the U.S. Supreme Court in early March. "It's probably the only thing in law I haven't done," Mr. Goldsmith says.

The case pits the U.S. Chamber of Commerce against the attorney general of California over a state law demanding that companies refrain from supporting or opposing unions' attempts to organize if the firms receive state funds. At issue is whether the statute conflicts with the National Labor Relations Act.

Brothers in law

A SARATOGA SPRINGS NATIVE, Mr. Goldsmith still enjoys a good snowstorm. He belongs to a

PERSONNEL FILE

FIRM Jones Day

TITLE Partner in charge, New York office

AGE 60

RÉSUMÉ Chair of labor and employment practice, Jones Day; member of OSHA's National Advisory Committee

EDUCATION B.A. from Brown University; J.D. from New York University

MANAGEMENT STYLE Hands-on

HOBBIES Downhill skiing

small ski club made up of corporate lawyers of his vintage, and they fit in a couple of trips each winter. He'll likely miss the next one, since he's due in Supreme Court that week. "I think they'll understand this time," he jokes.

In addition to preparing for his Supreme Court debut, Mr. Goldsmith must steer Jones Day's New York office through this era of uncertainty in the legal profession. The recent credit crisis has led to a sharp slowdown in corporate deals, forcing several big-name firms to cut back on staff. Some peer firms have used the dreaded "L" word—layoffs—while others prefer euphemisms such as "redistributing," "retooling," and "reconfiguring" practice groups.

Jones Day has never laid off lawyers for economic reasons, Mr. Goldsmith says, and he doesn't plan to start.

"We're positioned to absorb any changes in the market environment. We never put all of our eggs in one basket," he says, subtly referring to rival law firms that have ramped up practice groups in hot areas, only to find themselves overstaffed when those sectors cooled down.

Jones Day ranked No. 1 for the past four



years in number of mergers and acquisitions deals worldwide, according to Bloomberg data. Its New York and London offices are the busiest, helping to drive the firm's revenues to \$1.4 billion last year, *American Lawyer* reported—good enough to rank eighth among firms worldwide.

Some might find it daunting to take over a team with such a strong record, especially in an uncertain market. "My job is first to do no harm," Mr. Goldsmith observes.

On the move

HE DOES HAVE ambitious plans to build up Jones Day's M&A practice in New York, increase its book of private equity transactions, and expand the 300-lawyer local office.

"He's someone who gets the big picture quickly," says Trish Dunn, vice president of labor for The Washington Post Co. and a former Jones Day colleague. "He's good at directing a group of people toward an end."

Though he no longer has to worry about small details like filing fees, Mr. Goldsmith admits to being a little nervous about his appearance in front of the top judges in the country.

"The day you're not nervous arguing your case in front of any court—whether it's the Supreme Court or a state court—is the day you should probably hang it up," he says.

COMMENTS? HPotkewitz@crain.com