



Steven Fox
Solo practitioner

After being admitted to the bar in 1987 and working in general law practice for a few years, Steven Fox heard his love of art calling.

"I wanted to do something I loved. I didn't know back then (in 1993) if there was enough work out there, but I thought, if I can make (sports and entertainment law) 10 percent of my practice, then that will be 10 percent of my business that I really enjoy"

He stopped wearing a suit every day. Fox recalls meeting resistance from his father, who asked him how his clients would react to a dressed-down counselor. His response? "I hope they'll feel comfortable and not intimidated, but if they don't, I can put a suit back on."

Fifteen-plus years later, Fox is still going to work sans the suit, and artists, musicians, authors and photographers account for 80-90 percent of his clientele.

"I am an accomplished artist who knows the creative process," Fox said. "But I've also got the analytical business and legal skills, so I am able to convey concepts from right or left brain with language from the other side."

The practice has its perks, too.

"One good thing about representing bands," Fox noted with a smile, "is that my cover charge and bar tab are tax-deductible."

— By Matt Chandler



Michael Jackson
Jackson & Jackson LLP

Michael Lee Jackson has a deep and interesting pool of clients.

A partner in the Buffalo law firm of Jackson & Jackson LLP, Jackson has represented a who's who of local acts, and some national ones.

Yet, despite the high profile of some of his clients – whom he declined to identify, citing confidentiality clauses – Jackson said his role is a simple one.

"Strip it all down, and I'm no different than any other lawyer," Jackson said. "At the end of the day, my clients are seeking my counsel, and they want me to get the best deal I can for them. As a lawyer, you are bound to do the best ethical job you can for your client."

A guitar player and singer, Jackson knows both sides of the music and entertainment world. He's been a member of such as acts as Animal Planet and 10,000 Maniacs, and he's also sat at the negotiating table as a lawyer.

Stories of young artists getting bad deals from record labels, concert promoters and the like are well-documented. Being an entertainer, Jackson said he knows what his clients want – legal protection.

"My clients come to me because they want my help," he said. "A lot of them feel like they are being pressured into signing deals. My goal is to help them stay in the business they've chosen."

— By James Fink



Brent Nowicki
Hodgson Russ LLP

After playing Division I lacrosse at Fairfield University, Brent Nowicki had a choice to make: take a chance and pursue a career in professional lacrosse or opt for something more secure with long-term potential.

While friends and teammates turned to the pros, Nowicki turned to the University at Buffalo Law School. Little did he know a marriage between his career and his passion was not far behind.

Now an associate at Hodgson Russ LLP, Nowicki is a regional attorney/agent for the Professional Lacrosse Players Association and represents 10 professional athletes in three cities.

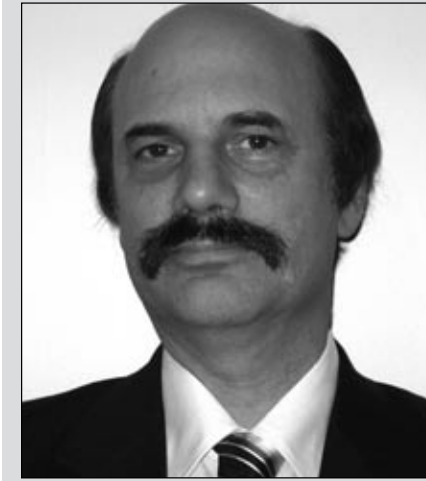
What may look like a game, he said, is still business.

"When you sit down at the negotiating table, you really are hashing out statistical numbers and evidence that support why your client should get more money," Nowicki said. "The hardest challenge I've had is having a player released this year. You know that he is good enough to start in the league, but the team was going in a different direction"

Nowicki hopes to add more players to his client roster and drum up more marketing opportunities for his players.

"If you do right by one of your players," he said, "the word of mouth gets out."

— By Matt Chandler



Stuart Shapiro
Cohen & Lombardo PC

Stuart Shapiro knows a thing or two about entertainment.

The Cohen & Lombardo lawyer has been a fixture in the local cultural scene for two decades, and his love for the arts fuels his practice.

He estimates that 20-25 percent of his practice is entertainment-based. The Western New York market, he says, poses a challenge for any lawyer trying to maintain a practice focused exclusively on arts/entertainment law.

"There isn't anyone in town here who can make a complete living doing this stuff, because we just don't have the market. If you want to do that, you are in L.A., Nashville or New York City," Shapiro said.

Today, Shapiro counsels artists, musicians, poets, authors and television personalities. "What very often happens is, the client comes to us late in the process in a bad deal to see how they can get out of it," he says.

Artists sometimes care so much about their craft that they overlook protecting their work, Shapiro says.

"Too often," he adds, "we see these Zen businessmen rushing to sign something just so they can say, 'Hey, I got a deal' or they can tell all of their music friends, 'We're signed to a record label,' and it leads them to jumping into things that aren't to their benefit"

— By Matt Chandler



Joe Shaw
Shaw & Shaw PC

Joe Shaw recalls the first time he negotiated a contract with the Buffalo Bills.

A founder of the Hamburg law firm Shaw & Shaw PC, he was representing one-time Bills quarterback Joe Dufek. Across the table was Bill Polian, who'd just begun his tenure as the team's general manager. "Somehow, Bill and I got through it" Shaw said.

Since then, Shaw has represented more than 20 Bills players, including the likes of Mark Kelso, Steve Tasker and Daryl Talley. Many retained his services after their playing days ended.

Shaw became certified as an agent with the National Football League Players Association in 1984. "What you have to be careful of is, when another player signs, to see how it may impact your negotiations," he advises.

Both Polian and his successor, the late John Butler, "were men of their words," Shaw said.

"There was no second-guessing with either of them. More importantly, both really cared about their players."

— By James Fink