

An International Heritage

An Interview with
Joseph C. Shenker, Chairman, Sullivan & Cromwell LLP

EDITORS' NOTE *Joseph Shenker joined Sullivan & Cromwell in 1980, became a partner in 1986, led the firm's global commercial real estate practice for more than 20 years, has been a member of the firm's Management Committee since 1996, and was named Vice Chairman in 2006 and Chairman on January 1, 2010. Among his pro bono and community activities, Shenker is a member of the Steering Committee of the Board of Visitors of Columbia Law School and a member of the Board of Trustees of The Mount Sinai Medical Center.*



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FIRM BRIEF *Headquartered in New York, Sullivan & Cromwell LLP (sullcrom.com; S&C) provides the highest-quality legal advice and representation to clients around the world. The results the firm achieves have set it apart for more than 130 years and have become a model for the modern practice of law. Today, S&C is a leader in each of its core practice areas and in each of its geographic markets. S&C's success is the result of the quality of its lawyers, the most broadly and deeply trained collection of attorneys in the world.*

How has the firm evolved to where it is today?

The firm was founded in New York City's Financial District in 1879, by Algernon Sydney Sullivan and William Nelson Cromwell. From the beginning, the firm's work focused on corporate finance for both domestic and international clients. Culturally, the firm's DNA was that of a professional, entrepreneurial, service-oriented meritocracy. Some of S&C's earliest involvements in America's greatest industrial, commercial, and financial enterprises include the formation of Edison General Electric Company in 1882 and United States Steel Corporation in 1901, and paving the way for the construction of the Panama Canal at the turn of the last century.

As a result, the firm's culture has always had an international focus. We've had clients and offices outside of the U.S. almost from the start and about 50 percent of our annual revenues are from clients headquartered outside the U.S.

Our goal is to maintain a presence in the major commercial capitals of the world. In addition to our offices in New York and in the major U.S. commercial, regulatory, and technology centers of Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and Palo

Alto, we have offices in Paris, London, Frankfurt, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Beijing, Sydney, and Melbourne.

But it is not enough to maintain a global presence. We strive to always be cutting-edge and creative so we can continuously deliver market-leading advice and service to our clients.

In non-U.S. markets, has it been difficult to find national and local talent?

Thankfully, we've been successful in building strong relationships with some of the best firms in various jurisdictions. We also have a very robust visiting lawyers program that was started more than 60 years ago in which we bring in lawyers from around the world who are already recognized as rising stars in their home jurisdictions for a year of training. Those lawyers then go back and continue on their career paths as prominent lawyers and are tremendous resources for S&C in our international practice.

We continually look for ways to build on our relationships with lawyers in our visiting lawyer program and with our other alumni. In addition to regular programs in New York, we sponsored alumni programs in Panama and in Shanghai last year – we have more than 300 alums in the Asia-Pacific region alone.

How challenging was 2008-2009, and where does the financial services industry stand today?

2008 was a challenging year, and we're still dealing with the fallout in terms of ongoing government investigations and litigations, as well as the implementation of new regulations.

As lawyers, it is challenging and exciting to be given the opportunity to have input into new regulation. We aim to do whatever possible to make sure any new law and regulation works for our clients and the industry, while at the same time having the curative effect intended.

How broad is your competition?

It comprises any firm that is doing sophisticated legal work in any of the jurisdictions in which we operate. We compete with the best out there.

How critical is it to mirror your client base with a diverse workforce?

Our biggest assets are our people and our brand name, so we foster an inclusive work environment to recruit the smartest people with

the highest IQs and EQs. It's about getting the best people, and thus you want the pool from which you recruit to be as big and broad as possible. A diverse group of lawyers can also best relate to a diverse client base as well as understand and relate to the person they find on the other side of the table.

Would you touch on the long history of the firm's pro bono work?

Bottom line: Not only is pro bono good business, but it's the right thing to do. We consider pro bono work an important commitment of every lawyer at S&C, as well as a tool with which lawyers can supplement and bolster their skills. The broader your human and legal experiences, the better off you will be.

With the emphasis on technology today, how important is it to retain a focus on the human element?

Technology obviously has its advantages. It allows us to practice more efficiently, in terms of both time and cost, particularly for legal work that doesn't require creativity and even human judgment, like using electronic search terms and other e-discovery innovations for large document reviews.

It also provides a degree of flexibility – you aren't chained to your desk and it is much easier to maintain an uninterrupted practice while outside the office.

Nevertheless, technology has eroded some of the human element in our profession. We can never lose sight of the fact that our clients are individuals, and people skills and the human touch are the most important and invaluable elements of lawyering. The key is to integrate new technological innovations in a way that enhances both our substantive practice as well as our soft skills. At the end of the day, our job is to use whatever skills and resources we have at our disposal to do the best possible job for our clients.

Would you reflect on where you are today, both as an active practitioner and as Chairman of Sullivan & Cromwell?

Every day, I think about how lucky I am. Never in a thousand years did I think I'd end up where I am today: both managing a fascinating business as well as having an extraordinary full-time legal practice.

S&C's unique non-hierarchical structure allows for true collaboration among all associates and partners. I am blessed to be able to work with clients and colleagues who continually challenge me. ●