

A True Partnership

An Interview with Robb W. Patryk, Managing Partner, Hughes Hubbard & Reed LLP

EDITORS' NOTE Robb Patryk is a trial lawyer and serves as Hughes Hubbard & Reed's Managing Partner. He also is a member of the firm's Executive Committee. Patryk has more than 30 years of experience in the national and international defense of numerous mass torts involving prescription drugs, medical devices, pesticides, asbestos, tobacco, dietary supplements, machinery, blood products, specialty chemicals, motor vehicles and petroleum products. Patryk has significant knowledge in particular of the pharmaceutical, medical device, tobacco, and specialty chemical industries, and serves as a trusted advisor to companies in those arenas in navigating the legal and regulatory challenges presented. Patryk was Co-Chair of the firm's Product Liability & Toxic Tort Group from 1999-2023. Patryk holds a BA degree from Yale College magna cum laude and a JD from New York University School of Law.



Robb W. Patryk

prides itself on fostering a collaborative environment within its teams and across its practices and offices, as well as with its clients and other law firms. Hughes Hubbard's long-held dedication to inclusion and pro bono makes its lawyers better and enhances creative problem-solving.

Will you highlight your career journey?

I have spent my entire career at Hughes Hubbard, which is increasingly rare in the profession today and something in which I take great pride. I joined the firm in May 1988 as a summer associate, worked part-time as a law clerk during my third year at NYU Law, and then joined the firm full time after law school as a young litigator. I have essentially grown up here – first as an associate handling complex commercial disputes and product liability matters, then as a partner, and now in firm leadership. What brought me here, and what has kept me here, are the firm's culture, the nature of the work, and the collaborative approach we bring to it. Hughes Hubbard is a place where you can be yourself without any need to check your personality, sense of humor, political views, or anything else at the door before entering; we are a diverse group of interesting professionals who respect and support one another, regardless of our respective backgrounds and interests. From early on, I worked on significant matters for sophisticated clients across several industries, and I saw firsthand the extent to which clients need and rely on sound judgment when the stakes are high, and the path forward is unclear.

Stepping into the Managing Partner role was not about changing direction; it was about helping the firm continue to evolve – in areas like finance and M&A, technology, and talent – while staying true to what has always made us strong: independence, excellence, and a culture of genuine partnership. In addition to my work in management, I still practice law which helps me continue to relate to my partners' and clients' needs and concerns.

How do you describe Hughes Hubbard's culture and values?

At its core, Hughes Hubbard is a true partnership. That is not a slogan; it is how we operate. We are intentionally sized so that our partners actually know one another and work together closely. When we gather for our annual partner retreat, we all fit in one large conference room. Clients work directly with senior lawyers who are hands-on and accountable, and that shapes our culture. People here take ownership of their matters, their client relationships, and the institution itself. We balance a deep sense of history with a forward-looking mindset. The firm traces its roots to Charles Evans Hughes, who went on to serve as Chief Justice of the United States and was an early champion of issues like women's suffrage. That legacy of integrity, public service, and openness to different perspectives still animates the firm today. You see it in our commitment to inclusion, in our pro bono work, and in the way we mentor younger lawyers. There is a real sense of stewardship; that each generation's job is to do great work for great clients and to leave the firm stronger for the next one.

What have been the keys to Hughes Hubbard's strength and leadership in the industry?

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Our results for our clients, our focus, and consistency of purpose. We have never tried to be everything to everyone. Instead, we have focused on areas where precision and judgment matter most – high stakes litigation and investigations, international arbitration, corporate restructurings, and sophisticated corporate and finance transactions. We have built deep credibility in these areas over decades.

Our structure is another differentiator. We are strategically and deliberately mid-sized: large enough to handle complex, global matters, but still small enough to move quickly, collaborate closely, and ensure real partner-level engagement. The vast majority of our work is cross border because we invest in long-standing relationships with the best independent firms in key jurisdictions rather than building a global footprint of our own. That independence allows us to pick the right lawyer in each market, avoid unnecessary conflicts, and make long-term decisions about clients, talent, and investments without being driven by short term pressures.

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What are the keys to retaining clients and maintaining long-term client relationships?

It comes down to trust, and trust is earned over time. Clients remember how you perform when it matters most: when the stakes are high, the facts are messy, and the options are not obvious. If you consistently bring sound judgment, responsiveness, and a deep understanding of their business, the relationship tends to take care of itself. We also focus on continuity and access. When a client hires Hughes Hubbard, they work with senior lawyers who stay engaged from start to finish. We do not staff matters with unnecessary “armies” of people. That lean, partner-driven model means clients know who is actually making the calls, and those lawyers know the client’s business, risk tolerance, and internal dynamics. Over time, the goal is to become a true strategic partner and someone the client calls not only when there is a problem, but when they are planning the next phase of their business.

How is AI impacting the way Hughes Hubbard operates?

AI is already impacting almost every aspect of how we work, and we are leaning into it

deliberately. After carefully testing a range of tools, we partnered with August AI so that we have a single, secure platform that can support both our legal practices and the business side of the firm. We are using AI to accelerate research, summarize large volumes of documents and data, support drafting, and surface insights from our own internal knowledge so that our lawyers can spend more time on what actually requires judgment.

At the same time, we are clear about what AI can and cannot do. Our business is not simply about information retrieval; it is about applying experience and judgment in complex, often ambiguous situations. AI can help us get to the right set of facts and options faster, but it does not replace the human judgment clients are paying us for. We are investing heavily in governance, training, and change management – including how we will train younger lawyers in an environment where some of the traditional “apprenticeship” work is now automated. For a firm like ours, AI is a way to remain fiercely independent and to “punch above our weight” without needing sheer scale for its own sake.

Will you highlight Hughes Hubbard’s commitment to pro bono work?

Pro bono is part of Hughes Hubbard’s core identity. From our founding, the firm has viewed law as a profession, not just a business, with obligations to the broader community. Our lawyers handle matters across a wide spectrum from asylum and immigration, civil rights and voting rights, criminal justice, impact litigation, to nonprofit counseling, and international human rights and humanitarian work. We approach these matters with the same rigor we bring to our largest commercial clients. In New York, for example, we have, for decades, counseled and supported the Legal Aid Society, with several partners including Charles Evans Hughes serving in leadership positions to ensure that free legal services are available to New Yorkers who might not otherwise have access to gifted lawyers.

What I am most proud of is that pro bono is integrated into the fabric of the firm. It is valued in evaluations and advancement, and lawyers at every level are encouraged to take on meaningful work. It strengthens our communities, deepens our lawyers’ skills, and reinforces the values we want the firm to stand for.

When you look to the future of the profession, what excites you the most, and what concerns you the most?

I am genuinely excited about the opportunity to rethink how we deliver legal services. Technology, especially AI, enables us to work more intelligently and efficiently, to mine data in ways that sharpen our advice, and to spend more time on the high value aspects of counseling and strategy. Clients are more sophisticated than ever which pushes firms to be sharper, more transparent, and more aligned with their strategic objectives. That is healthy for the profession.

My concerns are twofold. First, there is a real risk that we lose some of what makes this profession distinct: the emphasis on judgment, mentorship, and long-term thinking. As AI automates some of the traditional training work, we will need to be much more intentional about how we develop young lawyers through hands on mentoring and real-time coaching rather than just volume of tasks. Second, there are structural pressures from the chase for scale to the discussion around private equity and non-lawyer ownership that can pull firms away from a long-term, values driven mindset. For a firm like ours, staying independent, maintaining ethical judgment, and investing in our people over decades, not quarters, is central to how we define success.

What do you tell young people about the type of career the legal profession offers?

I tell young people that law is demanding, but it is also one of the most rewarding careers you can have if you are intellectually curious and motivated by problem solving. You will have the opportunity to work on issues that matter – helping companies navigate inflection points, resolving complex disputes, advancing important public interests, or shaping how business and government operate. I also emphasize that it is a profession where curiosity and judgment matter as much as raw intelligence. The best lawyers are students of business, people, strategy, and history. If you are willing to keep learning, to ask good questions, and to hold your integrity as non-negotiable, then the profession offers a path to long-term growth and responsibility in many directions – within law firms, in-house, in public service, in policy, and beyond. Finally, I remind them that where and with whom you practice matters. Being part of a true partnership, where people invest in each other and in the institution, can make all the difference in how fulfilling your career becomes. ●