

BRANDON BOOTH

Clients Drawn to His Ability to Make the Pieces Fit, Ensuring Successful Outcomes

by Ruth Kaufman



ROYAL OAK—Growing up, Brandon J. Booth, corporate attorney at Howard & Howard Attorneys PLLC in Royal Oak, was very close with his parents, who ran a small business selling car parts.

They were two of the most giving and generous people, particularly with their time, he says. “Looking back, it is really remarkable that they invested so much time in me.”

Booth, who has a younger brother and an older half brother, grew up in Southfield. When he was around 14, the family moved to Beverly Hills, where he attended Grove High School. He played golf all four years, and still golfs today. In addition, he played baseball for a year, wrestled for a short period and even did robotics for a year.

His parents were big on education because neither they nor their parents went to college. Booth was the first person in his immediate family to go.

At Michigan State University, Booth majored in construction management. “When considering college, all I wanted to do was find a way into construction. I loved LEGO® sets as a kid. They were my favorite thing, and I thought being a builder would be the greatest.”

Not only did he take 17 or 18 credits each semester in order to finish in 3½ years, but he also worked as a resident adviser and in campus planning and administration on construction contracts. He learned so much from his boss, attorney Jack Mumma, at MSU’s campus planning and administration department.

For his last two summers at MSU, Booth interned at Barton Malow Company, which, according to Booth, is “the Goldman Sachs of construction.” Upon graduation, the company made him an offer.

“I thought I was at the top of the world. In a lot of ways, I was,” he says.

Booth recalls being in a job trailer late one night when his dad called, pushing him to go to grad school. His reply was, “Are you kidding me? I just finished college.”

Though he didn’t really want to go, he started looking into options. A lot of his friends were considering MBAs, so he decided to try something different. He thought, “Well, Jack went to law school, and he’s one of the smartest individuals I know.”

TO BE OR NOT TO BE?

Booth didn’t really want to be an attorney, but he reasoned he could still be involved in construction and benefit from the higher level of education. So, maybe a law degree would be different and stand out more than an MBA.

After taking the LSAT, Booth got a scholarship offer from a school he’d never heard of, Thomas M. Cooley Law School (now the Thomas M. Cooley Law School at Western Michigan University). He decided to go at night and work full-time during the day. “That experience, working during the day and going to school at night, was brutal, but it taught me a lot,” he says.

Booth had no intention of being a lawyer

until close to the time he graduated *cum laude*. Advice he received toward the end of law school completely changed the course of his career. Someone told him that if he didn’t try law now, that ship would sail. But he could likely always go back to construction if he didn’t like law.

Choosing law made Booth feel bad at the time because Barton Malow had been so good to him throughout law school, including being flexible with his schedule if he needed to take a day class.

“They were incredibly supportive. Fortunately, when I left, they told me the door was always open,” Booth says.

About 1½ years into practicing law, Booth realized he felt a little down because he just wasn’t getting the same fulfillment at the end of the day as he previously experienced in construction. He wondered what he was doing and wasn’t sure he wanted to continue.

“I didn’t have my own clients at the time, but I did have a little pity party,” Booth says. “Then I started thinking. It’s all fixable. I’ll go get my own clients that I like working with.”

Nothing was really wrong, he realized, but he wanted to work on different things. He decided to improve his technical skill set and, at the same time, build the best relationships he could. Instead of cold calling, Booth wanted people to choose him because they trusted him and thought he’d do a good job.

Building his business that way was important to him then, as it is today. Booth now provides

corporate advice to mostly middle-market businesses and business owners, and he represents them in strategic transactions such as buying or selling businesses or real estate. His job combines many things he likes about construction while adding a new series of challenges he continues to enjoy.

“When I was a kid playing LEGOs and a young adult working in construction, I took pieces that were not particularly useful on their own. But when assembled properly, they represented something of significance,” Booth explains. “In law, it’s exactly the same, just different LEGOs. I help clients use the pieces they have to derive the best possible outcome. I tell people I’m still playing with LEGOs with clients by day and my kids at night.

“What I like in law now is that some days you get the picture and somebody says, ‘Build this for me.’ Other days, someone says, ‘I have all these pieces. What can I do with them?’” He enjoys both helping clients create the picture and building their picture.

Ryan Maibach, president and CEO of Barton Malow Company, first crossed paths with Booth when he was a construction intern. The company involves interns in many collaborative experiences, so they interacted in a variety of gatherings.

THE MAYOR REMEMBERS

“Brandon is the type of person you want to be around: insightful but thoughtful,” Maibach says. As an example, Maibach recalls that as a project engineer at Barton Malow, Booth worked on a project involving Southfield schools. The man responsible for that project on the client side is now mayor of Southfield.

Maibach ran into the mayor at an event. “It was rewarding that though it been many years, the mayor recalled several names of those who’d worked with him, Brandon being one of them. The mayor remembered him fondly. That Brandon made a very positive, lasting impression is indicative of the kind of relationships he develops.”

Maibach and Booth are members of Oakland Hills Country Club, where they’ve worked on a handful of projects together, including strategizing planning for the club.

“Brandon is well regarded and really enjoyable to work with. Many individuals well established in their careers interact with him and think very, very highly of him. They seek out his counsel and input in shaping these projects.

“In addition, I have a lot of respect for Brandon. He’s focused and dedicated to his family. Not only has he been effective in his career, but he’s very successful in life as a whole. That’s reflective of a relationally focused, positive individual. I think the world

of Brandon.”

Family plays an important role for Booth. His college roommate’s mother happened to be working with Booth’s soon-to-be wife, Christy, who taught eighth grade English at the time. His family’s name came up in conversation. When Christy said she knew of them, his roommate’s mother asked if she knew their son Brandon. When she replied, “Not really,” the mother said, “You’ve got to meet him.”

Their first communication was an exchange of messages on Facebook in February 2008. They met in person in April 2008, got engaged in August and married that December. The couple now has four young children, including twins.

His wife continues to work for the school district, both teaching and facilitating school improvement projects. “She’s quite the passionate person,” Booth says. “She’s one of the smartest and hardest-working people I know. Early on after having kids, I’d ask her if she wanted to take a few years away from work and stay at home. I quickly learned that was not an option. She truly loves working and helping kids.”

Booth devotes time and energy to Oakland Hills Country Club and Woodside Bible Church. Booth serves on committees at Oakland Hills, most notably the South Course construction committee.

At the church, Booth and his wife enjoy being small group leaders. Their group consists of about 14 couples, most of whom have children.

“It’s like a small network in a huge church. We have social activities, study to learn more about our faith and, most importantly, we serve the community to help those less fortunate.”

LIKE AN IN-HOUSE GENERAL COUNSEL

James Habel, CPA, CTP, chief financial officer at Humanetics Innovative Solutions Inc., worked with Booth while CFO at two companies. In both situations, Habel was handed the reins to the company’s legal needs and had to reimagine what each was doing. His previous company had had an in-house lawyer, but Habel decided to outsource with Booth and his firm. Habel says that was a little bit of a risk with the loss of direct control. “But the brilliant thing is that Brandon is passionate and energetic and really partners with his clients. So, in the end, you feel like you still have an in-house general counsel.

“With Brandon and Howard & Howard in general, they’re not billing every time I pick up the phone. He takes the time to learn your business, risk appetite, and corporate strategy and really helps you meet that. I feel like you get true opinions, not those that tow the company line.”

Booth has become a valuable partner with

Habel’s current company, too. “I’m amazed at how quickly he built relationships with others in the firm. Of course, he had a pre-existing one with me, but he built rapport with other executives, including the CEO, because of his hard work and awesome personality. He developed a high trust factor in a relatively short period of months, not years. He’s fantastic and can be an asset to anybody.”

Even a great career can have its challenges. “It’s easy to get overwhelmed, especially in this line of business,” Booth says. “What you have to do is focus on what you can control, develop a strong plan but be willing to adapt and, more than anything, continue to put one foot in front of the other.

“It can be hard for me as I’m not always in the same shoes. If I’m representing the buyer or seller, one side may have more leverage. If a seller has five interested parties, we can still compete, but in a very fair way. You have to recognize who has leverage yet treat someone the way you want to be treated. In law, that’s so important.”

Samuel Haidle is one of Booth’s partners at Howard & Howard. The patent and trademark lawyer’s business crosses over with Booth’s mostly on acquisitions where technology is involved.

“Brandon is really fantastic at making clients feel comfortable as he understands more than the legal issues.” Booth takes financial aspects and timing into consideration and ensures that everything they’re doing makes good business sense, he adds.

“I really appreciate that because I have a similar philosophy in representing clients,” Haidle says. I’m not just here to churn a fee, I’m here to help them accomplish goals. Brandon does a really great job of that, not only seeing the client through some complicated legal matters but also helping them feel comfortable that they’ll be taken care of.”

Booth was made partner quickly—within his first year—because the firm recognized his many great attributes, Haidle says. “On top of being a darn good lawyer, he’s a really humble and nice person. He’s easy to work with and really connects well with clients, who react positively to his humble and frank, open conversation approach.”

Booth likes that he’s become friends with most of his clients and knows almost all their spouses and children.

“Certain things are just legally right or wrong,” he says. “What’s hard is determining what’s right for this individual or business. When you know your clients better, you can provide better advice.”

His goal is to provide his clients real value, where he can look back and say, “It’s not just about billing hours but enhancing something and making making a difference.” ■