

Law Firm Leaders: Crowell & Moring's Philip Inglima

By Aebra Coe

Law360 (June 5, 2019, 11:42 AM EDT) -- Crowell & Moring LLP chair Philip Inglima has high hopes for the law firm's future as it celebrates its 40th anniversary this week.

Inglima, who was elected to lead the law firm in 2017, said in a recent interview with Law360 that the law firm is in "growth mode" and has plans to add new attorneys in multiple offices.

In the 40 years since it was founded, Crowell & Moring has grown from 53 lawyers to approximately 550.

Here, a chat with Inglima about his aspirations for the law firm, his view on a shifting legal industry and the dinner he had early in his career with Justice William Brennan Jr.

How is the business of law changing and how is your law firm adapting?

I think the business is changing, the profession or practice of law is not. I think that the business is changing because, obviously, there are firms scaling up considerably, there are clients looking for services in different ways than they used to, considering different ways of engaging firms. But, in the end, we're still providing what I think are the three essentials of excellent legal service — that's knowledge, experience and judgment. So we still have to equip ourselves to be the trusted advisers, to be professionals who understand the businesses that we counsel, and to help the business leaders not just contend with problems, but even look ahead to what's coming.

So, some things change, some don't. I do think we find ourselves in a more robust level of mobility for legal professionals at all ranks. People think about mobility differently than they used to and that does create both a challenge and an opportunity. Being in growth mode, we're both advancing people internally and tapping into the lateral market.



Philip Inglima
Crowell & Moring
chair

How does your firm work to compete in the marketplace in order to attract legal talent?

We always try to keep aware of and true to who we are. We're celebrating our 40th anniversary this year. And that's fairly young by BigLaw standards, but it is a considerable achievement for a firm that was formed by 53 lawyers breaking away from one of the country's largest firms at the time [Jones Day]. We have, throughout our history, kindled a spirit of doing things differently, doing things in our own way.

You said the firm is in "growth mode." What is its growth strategy?

We feel both an opportunity and a need to grow in terms of always being confident we can supply the best legal services and the depth of teams and practice experience that we have now. So we're now growing to introduce all sorts of new capacities. We're growing to deepen and enrich the capacities that we've identified as core to who we are. And, over the 40 years we've existed, that has expanded from a very deep regulatory core and has substantially expanded into litigation and transactional work over our history. We're at the point where two-thirds of our people, whether they're regulatory specialists or not, are litigators and a growing number of our people, even if they are counselors, are also transactional lawyers.

As we've grown we've chosen some new sites. In the last year we've spent a lot of time growing in New York, London and Shanghai, where we've just begun operations through a trade affiliate, Crowell & Moring International, and we'll be moving rapidly toward a full legal office in that new venue for us and new continent for us.

The other reason we're growing is 40 years ago the profession looked different than it does now, the client community looked different than it does now. We are not content to just continue slow growth toward what is much-needed diversity throughout our profession. We've really been trying to emphasize diversity in both our internal growth and in our lateral growth. We are seeing good results from it, but it is something that we know requires concerted effort, and it's something we know our clients, rightly, expect of us.

Beyond that, in terms of geography, we have built up to over 100 lawyers in our three California offices. We are quite intent on continuing to deepen California, New York and London. We're really looking to grow just about everywhere. Our D.C. office is about 300 and we want to continue growing here as well. We've been trying to identify the right kind of additions, many of them individuals or small groups. But also in the last year we had some success with bringing in practices that were intact at other firms, people who were already well-established in the legal community. We want to continue to look at additions that are more than just a few at a time.

What trait do you believe is most important for a law firm partner?

There are so many that we expect of our partners. I think an incredibly important one is simply judgment. I think judgment has many implications and applications. When I think of judgment I think of someone who has empathy, someone who has discernment, someone who will always push himself or herself in a healthy way to achieve at a high level, and will know what's the right level — what's required of us to get the job done for clients, what is the right level of ask for our colleagues. I think having the judgment and perspective to understand that partners are leaders in a firm and have to sometimes lead by example and sometimes lead from behind by providing opportunities for others and being their support.

What's one mistake attorneys often make early on in their careers?

I think it is often resistance to criticism. Sometimes it can be hard for a fairly new lawyer to hear criticism from a mentor or any superior, and certainly from a client. But lawyers who can take that in, accept it, and make judgments about how to improve and how to get better at both their craft and at their delivery of service to the client — that's just vital. Sometimes it takes the front line experience that can sometimes be daunting to a junior lawyer and it takes the willingness to risk mistakes, as long as you're surrounding yourself with support and making sure others are there to help you course-correct along the way and help you get better professionally. No one springs from the head of Zeus as a fully formed lawyer. And anyone who thinks they're not going to have room for improvement at every level of their career is making the ultimate mistake.

What well-known lawyer, alive or dead, would you most like to have lunch with and why?

I've been a bit spoiled because, for one thing, my first professional mentor was very generous with me and he got me a dinner with just the two of us and Justice William Brennan when he was late in his career. Being a young lawyer, being from New Jersey, and being quite enamored with Justice Brennan's wisdom, it was a fantastic opportunity for me. I also had an incredible opportunity for a meal with Justice O'Connor after her retirement. I think if I could add to that I would have loved to have sat down and visited with Thurgood Marshall, especially after many years on the court. He had such a trailblazing career, endured such unthinkable indignities, challenges and achievements. I can't think of anybody who would be more inspirational as a lawyer than someone who made law before the court and then construed law on the court as he did for so long at an incredibly transforming point in our country's history and in the evolution of American jurisprudence.

--Editing by Rebecca Flanagan and Alyssa Miller.