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Love of gadgets led to career in patent law

THE SECRET TO ROGER WYLIE'S SUCCESS? HE LIKES TO FIX THINGS.

BY CASEY COOMBS

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As managing partner of Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton, a Seattle law firm specializing in intellectual property, Roger Wylie never has a shortage of patent work.

The self-proclaimed tinkerer started his career doing mechanical patent work for several companies, including Boeing. Then, he noticed “the world was going software” and pivoted, focusing mainly on work for Microsoft.

Now, a recent Supreme Court decision has led to a shift in the patent filing strategies of software companies like Amazon. That’s also worked out well for Wylie.

How did you get into law? I studied materials engineering as an undergrad and my mentor, Roy Wilcox, didn’t see me being a long-term engineer. I arrived the first day of law school and the first professor I met said you should be a patent attorney. At the end of my first year I went home for a couple of weeks and my dad said we’re going to go to Atlanta to visit my patent attorney. I went into this guy’s office and he had all these gadgets all over the walls – I mean just different kinds of you name it – and he told me all about what he did. And I saw the light and I was like, ‘this is me.’ I’ve always been someone who fixed everything.

Where did you get your knack for tinkering? My father was like that times 10. We never threw anything away. I remember having two repair people come to the house the entire time I was growing up. The air conditioner guy came one time and my dad stood and looked over his shoulder and watched what he did. When he left, my dad said, “I can do that next time.” I kind of feel the same way. Though I do recognize the inefficiencies of fixing your own refrigerator – it can take you all day long versus \$200 to pay somebody to do it.

How did you wind up in Seattle? My wife and I both went from a boutique firm in Atlanta to a boutique firm in Seattle – similar size, similar structure. I did that for three years until



Roger Wylie, managing partner of Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton, says the best engineers are “tinkerers — people who enjoy taking things apart.”

I saw the world was going software, so a friend and I started our own firm. Another friend moved here from Chicago to do Microsoft work and his firm contacted the two of us and said they’d love to have a local office. He said he didn’t want to do it. I hemmed and hawed about it for about three weeks and joined the Chicago firm and stayed there for almost six years from 2002 to 2008.

Then where did you go? I came to Kilpatrick Townsend in 2008, when it was Townsend and Townsend and Crew. So I joined in April 2008 and became the office manager here in 2009 and then I was on the management committee of the firm in

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ROGER WYLIE

Firm: Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton

Title: Managing partner

Hometown: Georgia

Office size: 39

Lives in: Magnolia

Education: J.D. from Vanderbilt University Law School; bachelor's in materials engineering from Auburn University.

Family: Roger and his wife, Daiva, have a daughter Asta (18) and a son Aidan (14).

Ideal dinner party guests: Golf legend Bobby Jones, Frank Sinatra and Oprah (to see if she's running for president).



KILPATRICK TOWNSEND

2010 when we went through the merger. I walked into the first management meeting and the then-chairperson of the firm and the managing partner said, "We're in merger discussions and we're getting pretty close to announcing it to the partnership with an Atlanta-based firm."

Which firm was it? Kilpatrick Stockton, which, oddly enough, had acquired the boutique firm where I'd started my career in Atlanta. So I was going to be working with all the same people I had worked with 15 years earlier. Going into the merger, I knew 50 attorneys prior to our discussions. It's been a great deal for the firm but for me in particular because of my roots back in Georgia.

What kinds of trends are you seeing in patent law? The one that's kind of a little bit of an old story right now is the Supreme Court's 2014 Alice decision, which says you cannot patent an abstract concept. Part of the case says that if you're using hardware other than a computer itself then it's probably not going to be an abstract idea. If, for example, it's robotic, you've got software in a robot (so you may not) have a problem with it being considered abstract.

How has that affected business? Clients are focusing a lot more on tying in hardware to the patents that involve controllers and software. I'm hiring more and more attorneys who have some mechanical background to understand how things work. So it's a full circle for those of us who have mechanical backgrounds. It's worked out well for me because I have both software and mechanical experience.

How do you hire the right people? On the engineering side, you've got to hire tinkerers – people who enjoy taking things apart. If they're in pure software, they enjoy when they get home playing with their computer – gamers, for example. They're not people who are doing this because it's a career where you can make good money. They're doing it because they're attracted to technology.

How do you manage effectively? Ultimately by getting out of the way. My management style is to say, "Here's my expectations: We do things well and we don't cut corners. But if you do well, I'm going to leave you alone. I want to know what's happening and I'll review everything you do, but for the most part I'm not going to flyspeck your work."

A DAY IN THE LIFE

We asked Roger Wylie to break down his typical work day for us:

- Work
- Sleep
- Downtime
- Exercise

7 p.m.

Dinner at home or community volunteer meetings 2-3 times a week, check emails through the evening

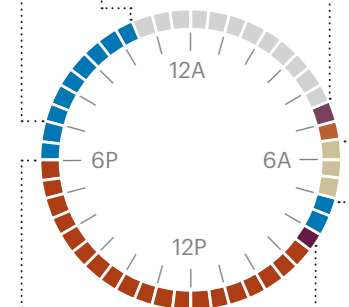
4:40 a.m.
Wake

4:50 a.m.
First breakfast

5 a.m.
Check email

5:30 a.m.
Arrive at gym, workout

10:40 p.m.
Bedtime



7 a.m.
Read papers with friends at gym

6 p.m.
Leave work

8 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Most of the day is scheduled with meetings

8 a.m.
Second breakfast; arrive at work