

How Kilpatrick's New Chair Found His Passion For The Law

By **Emily Johnson**

Law360 (July 3, 2024, 2:59 PM EDT) -- Like his father and uncles before him, Wab Kadaba appeared to be on a path to a career in engineering.

But an interest in intellectual property law instead put Kadaba on a journey through the legal profession that has now led to him becoming chair of Kilpatrick, formerly known as Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton LLP.

After leading the firm's IP department for more than 11 years, Kadaba took the reins Monday as firm chair, replacing Henry Walker. Under Walker's leadership, Kilpatrick experienced 11 consecutive years of gross revenue growth and more than doubled its profits per partner, according to the firm.



Wab Kadaba

Now Kadaba, who has been with the firm for nearly 25 years and is based in Atlanta, says he wants to build on that success.

"We'll continue the tradition of being forward-looking and technology-focused, recognizing the importance of staying abreast of all kinds of changes that are happening to our clients and the legal profession," he said.

Kadaba joined Law360 Pulse to discuss how his mechanical engineering background led him to law school and IP law, his goals in this new role, and how he wants the firm to build on its strong work for technology companies.

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity and length.

What has it been like practicing IP law at the firm?

It's been really fun to practice IP law here. My goal as IP chair was to make this the best place to practice IP law. We made a lot of progress in that regard. I feel really good about where my personal practice is today. Part of my work is getting to counsel clients on interesting and strategic problems that are business-related issues that have at their core an IP component, and I am a combination of a strong IP lawyer and a good client counselor on a variety of issues.

When that comes together, it tends to provide a high value to the client and reach some of the top decision makers for the client. It's been a tremendous journey for me. I've been fortunate to have

handled some high-stakes patent and trade secret cases for wonderful clients that have trusted us with those matters.

We have a great team that I've helped develop over the years. They're at the top of their game and at the top of the industry. We're not going to miss a beat at all. They're fantastic.

What does it mean for you as a minority attorney to lead the firm in a profession in the U.S. that is plagued by underrepresentation of minorities?

I haven't dwelled on it too much, but my path here is the product of the firm's inclusive nature and how I've been embraced by the firm from the start. I was fortunate to have a lot of great opportunities both with respect to leadership roles and getting out in front of clients.

The firm's support allowed me to develop a strong practice, and my profile externally in the broader IP market and as a firm leader. That has manifested itself in this opportunity to me. I'm proud of my identity. I'm proud of being an Atlantan and an engineering student who never thought he was going to go to law school until a spur of events.

Why did you want to go to law school?

My father and uncles were engineering professors. I went to graduate school to study mechanical engineering. I was probably headed down a path to following in their footsteps as an engineering professor or at least an engineer. I had some internships and a little bit of understanding of the career path in engineering. While I love technology, I didn't want to focus on one area of technology for my entire career.

I thought about what I could do with this engineering education that I had invested a lot in, and client services seemed to be an opportunity. After talking to IP lawyers, it seemed extremely interesting and an opportunity for me to stay involved with technology, deal with clients and people on a regular basis, and have a diversity of the types of technology and legal issues that have certainly resulted in what for me has been a compelling practice.

What are your goals for leading the firm?

We're going to be collaborative in our approach. I've been here for almost 25 years. It's a privilege to lead the firm. We have been counsel to some of the world's most innovative companies for a long time now and have been at the forefront of technology ourselves as counselors to companies.

We'll continue the tradition of being forward-looking and technology-focused, recognizing the importance of staying abreast of all kinds of changes that are happening to our clients and the legal profession.

I want to make sure we continue that tradition. We're considered leaders in that space where technology intersects with the law.

How do you plan on continuing the firm's upward trajectory?

We want to capitalize on all of the momentum with respect to all the strong leadership for the past 12 years. It's a good opportunity for us to stop and reflect on what's caused our success and refine that

approach. I don't think we'll deviate dramatically from an extraordinarily successful firm but continue to refine it.

As I continue to talk to our partners and learn about our many outstanding practices, particularly the ones I have not had as much exposure to, I'm getting a better sense of why we've been successful. We'll continue to see opportunities to grow. We have a strong bench of innovative clients and we'll continue to position ourselves to better serve them.

How do you manage the firm's large footprint across the U.S. and around the globe?

I'll have a better answer in a few months, but I've been on our management committee for the last 11 years. I've gotten to know the IP practice extraordinarily well and that resides in virtually every one of our offices. In that role, I've been on the road quite a bit visiting our colleagues and our clients, and I've developed some strong relationships.

I've been very cognizant of this being a full-service law firm and the importance of our other practices and have some developed strong relationships. I will continue to do that in an intentional way. I'm in the process of visiting as many, if not all, of our offices. I started a few months ago and I'm going to visit offices through the summer, which will give me an opportunity to listen to ideas from a large group of lawyers.

We also have a great management team. It's not just me. I rely heavily on the other folks that are dedicating their time and energy to manage the firm. I think we'll be able to be present when needed across a large firm.

What are the firm's most in-demand practice areas?

We continue to have strong practices across our three departments — corporate, litigation and intellectual property. Within those practice areas, a lot of the middle market mergers and acquisitions and private equity continue to be strong. I'd say the same for technology transactions. We have a lot of litigation right now both in the IP space and other areas of technology litigation. We have a strong bench of IP lawyers that maintain IP rights for our clients, whether they're patent rights or trademark rights.

What do you want the firm's reputation to be in three to five years?

I think we'll want to continue to grow and grow with respect to how we can better serve our clients. We have a strong reputation in several practice areas. I want to leverage those to grow additional ones.

Our strength in IP allows us to lean into technology even more than we have historically. I think in the next three to five years, I'd like us to take that on and become a well thought of firm broadly across the needs of companies that are deeply involved in technology.

--Editing by Robert Rudinger.