Kilpatrick

Insights: Publications

Meet the Dealmakers | Justin Heineman

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MEET THE DEALMAKERS

Justin Heineman

Justin began his career with Kilpatrick, where he was elevated to partner before leaving several years later to join the Legal Department of the former NCR Corporation.

While at NCR, Justin served as Law Vice President and Chief Corporate Counsel, with broad responsibility for NCR's M&A, securities, and corporate governance matters around the world.

Following his time at NCR, Justin joined BlueLinx Holdings, a NYSE-listed building products distributor located in Atlanta, where he served as General Counsel and a member of the executive leadership team.

He rejoined Kilpatrick in early 2021.

After a decade in-house, you chose to rejoin big-law at the firm where you started your career. What drove you to want to rejoin a law firm?
In my experience, so many in-house corporate and transactional lawyers today roll up their sleeves and function as actual hands-on practitioners in their day-to-day work. When I was with NCR, that's how we operated—in the trenches with our outside counsel doing deals, writing contracts, and addressing issues. But by being in the corporate setting, in-house lawyers also develop another set of skills that you can't replicate at a law firm.

By late 2020, I became convinced that a "practicing in-house lawyer" should be able to be successful in a law firm setting because they can offer this really unique value to clients—the services of a good technical lawyer who can also think like in-house counsel.

I knew that pursuing that theory could be a bit of a personal risk, but I was at a point in my career where I thought I could invest the time and effort, so I took the leap.

What made you decide that Kilpatrick would provide the right platform for you?
One of the biggest factors was leadership.

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Ben Barkley (Chair of Kilpatrick's Corporate Department) and **Wab Kadaba** (Chair of Kilpatrick's Intellectual Property Department) have been close friends of mine for years. They were immediately supportive, and I realized after a few discussions that Kilpatrick presented the only viable platform for a move like this.

Our firm's Chair & CEO, **Henry Walker**, also had a very similar background, having spent considerable time in-house himself in the middle of his career.

At its core, this firm is a collection of super-supportive people that understood what I was trying to do and were willing to give me the latitude to try to do it.

You mentioned that in-house lawyers develop a skill set that's different than what you get at a firm. What exactly did you learn by being in-house?
That's a simple question with a long answer, so I'll focus on one thing I've been considering a lot recently, which is the need for outside counsel to demonstrate value.

Regarding value, I don't think many big-law lawyers put nearly enough emphasis on the opportunity cost to clients of choosing to engage outside counsel.

The money clients spend on outside counsel could otherwise be allocated to headcount, equipment, or technology upgrades, or employee compensation or benefits, among other things. These are all items that can have a direct effect on the lives of in-house teams, employees, and stakeholders.

This puts a premium on outside counsel that delivers value and constantly looks for ways to demonstrate that value. It's incumbent upon lawyers to ask themselves every day whether the service that they've provided is worth the number that they put on the invoice, because I can assure you that clients are asking that very same question.

That's been a big part of what I love about Kilpatrick—its focus on value and the flexibility and tools that its lawyers are given to deliver that value to clients in a way that meets their specific needs and preferences.

How has your practice developed since returning to Kilpatrick and what's in store going forward?
I've been fortunate to link up with some great clients since I rejoined the firm, and our Corporate team had strong performance over the past three years, including 2023.

We provide exceptional value to middle and lower middle market clients and M&A transactions, particularly deals driven by private equity, and that aligns well with my practice. Within that framework, I've been focused particularly on strengthening our building products and supplies, and commercial and residential services industry teams.

Our building products and supplies industry team has deep experience, covering strategic and private equity-backed clients in building product manufacture and distribution, landscape supply, infrastructure solutions, and construction materials and services.

In the commercial and residential services space, we're helping clients do deals in a broad range of areas, including HVAC installation and repair, roofing services, environmental and alternative energy services, pump and wastewater infrastructure services, and fire and life safety services.

On March 1, we'll finalize our combination with HMB Legal Counsel, and we have a ton of momentum entering this year.

I'm honored to be a part of this firm and this team, and I'm excited to get a chance to tell our story.

To learn more about Justin and the firm's nationally recognized M&A and Securities Team, visit *ktslaw.com*

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Related People

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