

Executive Profile

GENE MILLER

CHAIRMAN, MILLER STARR REGALIA

Company: Miller Starr Regalia. The real estate, business and litigation law firm has 55 attorneys in Walnut Creek and Palo Alto.

Background: Miller has been chair of the law firm since 1985. He started practicing in 1974.

Education: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

First job: Working at my parent's hardware store when I was 5. That store was in Chicago. I can cut pipe and cut glass.

Residence: Lafayette.



Business philosophy

Essential business philosophy: It is to produce a top-grade product or service and the rest will follow.

Best way to keep competitive edge: For us certainly it's to maintain our focus as a speciality real estate firm and not get diverted into other areas.

Guiding principle: The golden rule is something you need to look at all the time. Also, never ask someone to do something you are not willing to do

yourself.

Yardstick of success: The respect of your colleagues.

Goal yet to be achieved: Grandparent.

Judgment calls

Best business decision: Certainly joining the firm in 1979 and staying here for my entire career. There are points when you can get diverted, but staying here and being with people I enjoy practicing with — it has been a blessing.

Worst business decision: Not selling out of the market six months ago. Why didn't I see this coming?

Toughest business decision: On a macro level, there was a lot of pressure two, three years ago with consolidation and some potentially attractive merger offers, and deciding we were not pursuing the "grass is greener" approach. It was a tough decision, but it was the right one. We discussed what was important to us. And that's mostly being able to decide our own fate.

Biggest missed opportunity: I'm sure there were a lot of opportunities during the dot-com bubble that I did not take advantage of.

Mentor: I've had a lot of people I have gotten a lot from. I can't think of one person in particular. You can draw the best parts of people and pattern yourself after them using what works for you.

The one word that best describes you: Committed.

True confessions

Like best about job: The people I work with. Clients and people I work with. That's the rewarding side of this business, to be a trusted adviser and the good friendships that come with that.

Like least about job: Keeping track of billable hours. That's the worst part. You try to do your job and you have to stop and think about doing this and that.

Pet peeve: People who come late to meetings and they want you to start over for them.

Most important lesson learned: The most important thing is to treat people the way you want to be treated.

Person most interested in meeting: Right

now, it would be Barack Obama. I'm going to the inauguration.

Most respected competitor: The Wendel Rosen Black & Dean firm.

Three greatest passions: First and foremost, the family. I really enjoy travelling and lastly the Chicago Bears.

First choice for a new career: I would be a kindergarten teacher. It's a bit like what I do here. There are lots of similarities.

Predilections

Favorite quote: "The mark of true character is what you do when no one is watching."

Most influential book: I can't think of any that jumps out at me.

Favorite cause: I do work for multiple sclerosis. A long time ago, one of my partners succumbed to that disease. It's very cruel. When I have time, I spend time doing that.

What's on your iPod: It's really a kind of eclectic collection. A lot of Ray Charles, blues and jazz and other stuff.

Favorite status symbol: I'm not big on status symbols at all.

Favorite movie: "Charade." An old Audrey Hepburn movie. It was released probably in 1963.

Favorite restaurant: Cafe Esin in Danville. A great little community restaurant.

Favorite vacation spot: I like to travel a lot. We go to Ixtapa a lot.

Favorite way to spend free time: If I can spend an afternoon with one of my kids going to a sporting event or hiking, it's always good.

Automobile: A Nissan 360Z.

— Eric Young ■