High-Stakes Lawyering

Representing the Richest Man in the World

Steven Selsberg, JD ’86, has made a name for himself litigating high-stakes cases for clients such as billionaire Carlos Slim Helú and tobacco giant Philip Morris. Serendipity also has played a role, as a business connection between the man whom Forbes lists as the “richest man in the world” and the tobacco company led to Selsberg’s expanded client list.
Selsberg’s client list is now almost exclusively Latin American. He has represented Grupo Carso, Telefonos de Mexico, Condumex, Grupo Sanborns, Banco Inbursa, Grupo Pegaso, Grupo Mexico, ICA, and others in numerous litigation matters throughout the United States. He also has represented Cardinal Norberto Rivera in clergy litigation in Los Angeles.

Selsberg attributes his success in large part to his law school training and his determination never to be “out-lawyered.” “When the lawsuit lands on your desk, the facts are already made,” he says. “The dispute presents itself to you with certain witnesses, certain documents, and the applicable law. My job is to try to find a way to win, if there is one, or just to learn all the strengths and weaknesses of the case so that we can get the best result,” adds Selsberg. “At the end of the day, you’re not going to win every single case, but if I hold myself to the standard of not being out-lawyered by the other side, I feel like I’ve done my job.”

THAT REQUIRES HARD WORK, determination, and preparation, he says, which is where his Washington University training has paid off. “Whether or not you’re going to be successful in your law practice is dependent on your skill set and your effort,” he says. “When I came to Houston, I felt very prepared because I had a superior education at Washington University.”

Selsberg says that the demanding professors, bright students, and balance between “the nuts and bolts of what you need to practice and the academic side of the law” worked in concert to give him “a great education.” He says he maintains a strong sense of loyalty to the university and notes that his sister, Julie Selsberg, graduated from the law school in 1995 and his son, Jared, is a current undergraduate at the university.

Selsberg continues to learn about law and life, including lessons from Helú. “I’ve been inspired by the fact that as wealthy and as famous as he is, that he has such a close relationship with his family and his children—and that they are humble and grounded,” Selsberg says. “So I’ve tried to emulate that. I make spending time with my wife and children a priority, and try to stay very humble and low key. I learned that from Carlos Slim Helú.”