

MARTHA SABOL

Changing Roles Was Safe Bet for Manager in Gaming Industry

by Jordyn Reiland

For some people, starting law school at 36 with a young daughter would be an insurmountable challenge. For Martha A. Sabol, taking that next step in her professional career just made sense.

“Making that kind of commitment, leaving a very successful career to invest in the law was a huge step, but I really believed I could do it,” Sabol recalls.

Sabol already had a rewarding profession in business management, but law school was often in the back of her mind.

After graduating from the University of New Hampshire in 1982, Sabol worked in management positions at food service provider Aramark. She then went on to become regional sales manager and vice president of sales at ServiceMaster.

After about 14 years in management, she took a leap of faith and signed up to attend night classes, which eventually became day classes, at Loyola University Chicago School of Law. It paid off.

“I really appreciated the ability at 36 to have an opportunity to learn how to think about things from a lawyer perspective as opposed to sales or management,” she says. “It was a wonderful opportunity to improve on my critical thinking and analysis.”

Sabol is now co-chair of the gaming practice at Greenberg Traurig, LLP in Chicago, where she focuses on gaming regulatory and business law.

“It’s been a great career, and I think having the business experience and going to school a little bit later in life and having experience under my belt has been really helpful in building this business,” she says.

Not only has she brought on personal success in the next phase of her professional career, her colleagues have a lot to thank her for as well.

“I tell everyone that because of Martha, I’ve had the best big law experience you could possibly have,” says Edward R. Winkofsky, a Greenberg Traurig shareholder who has known Sabol since 2002.

“There are a lot of people who work at Greenberg Traurig, and she always made it feel



like I was coming to work somewhere where I could contribute, where I wouldn’t get lost in the crowd.

“To the extent that I have any success in my career, I attribute an enormous amount of that, if not all of it, to things I’ve learned from Martha or in some cases from her direct intervention,” he says.

Michael J. Bonner, co-managing shareholder of Greenberg Traurig’s Las Vegas office, agrees. “She brought both her tremendous intellect and legal skills along with marketing talents. She really understands how to communicate

with clients,” he says. “It makes a huge difference.”

FORGING AHEAD

When Sabol graduated from law school in 1999 and decided to practice law, she faced some skepticism.

“Law firms would say, ‘We really can’t see you as a first year associate at 40,’” she recalls. “Some of them didn’t believe I wanted to make that kind of time investment.”

But she did, even if having a young child at the time required some balance. She even

moved into the city so she would not have to make the commute from Naperville.

On her first day as an associate at DLA Piper, Sabol also walked her daughter, Kathryn Sabol, to her first day of kindergarten.

While at DLA Piper, Sabol practiced corporate, transactional and securities law. She enjoyed the new experience but missed being in the boardroom and making business decisions.

Sabol took a job with Hyatt Gaming Management in 2003 where she was brought in as assistant general counsel and served as vice president, general counsel, secretary and chief compliance officer.

At the time, Hyatt Gaming Management owned, managed and consulted with casinos in the United States and abroad.

As head of the legal department, Sabol was responsible for supervising all legal and compliance functions as well as administrative and corporate governance activities. During her seven years at Hyatt, Sabol was able to meld her appreciation for the legal field and management.

Winkofsky says Sabol's business and legal acumen have made her such a successful lawyer.

"That is in large part what distinguishes her from other attorneys," he says.

"She always brings a business sense to every situation, and it just makes her such a better counselor and a more informed and thoughtful counsel to the general counsel and business units that are our clients."

Mark A. Clayton, co-chair of the global gaming practice at Greenberg Traurig, expresses similar sentiments.

"Clearly the Hyatt in-house experience gave her a 'letter appreciated' for some of the business elements facing in-house counsel," he says. "She understands what the demands are and tailors her advice to address that and give respect to that."

However, while working for Hyatt, Sabol started to realize that a company with interests in several different locations across the globe would have to hire a new lawyer each time they entered a new jurisdiction. Sabol wanted to change that, so she did.

ONE STOP SHOP

Sabol joined Greenberg Traurig in 2006, and just two months later she was launching the firm's global gaming practice.

As its co-chair, Sabol represents national and international casino owners, operators and suppliers in the areas of regulatory compliance, acquisition, licensure, internal investigation matters and corporate counseling.

"It's really been a benefit for our clients to work with one law firm," Sabol says. "If they are going to develop a casino in a new

jurisdiction, they can call us versus contacting a new law firm that does not know the company or its business."

The firm operates out of 38 offices worldwide, including key gambling markets such as Nevada, Illinois, New York, Florida, Asia, the United Kingdom and Europe.

In 2015, Sabol was named Gaming Lawyer of the Year in Chicago by *Best Lawyers in America*. One year later, Sabol served as president of the International Association of Gaming Advisors, the largest association of leading U.S. and international gaming executives, attorneys and financial advisers.

Sabol says Greenberg Traurig's one stop shop makes it stand out among its competitors.

"There are a lot of local law firms that practice locally, but there are very few I know of that have the reach we have, the depth we have, and the number of services we can provide," she says.

Bonner has known Sabol since 2009, and the two have worked extensively on client matters and firm management.

"She has invested many, many hours in getting to know the industry and the clients

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in the industry," Bonner says. "I just think the world of her."

As co-chair of the firm's women's initiative, Sabol supports the development of Greenberg Traurig's female attorneys by assisting with local and national programming, training, professional development, mentoring and client development.

She also serves as a mentor for younger lawyers who want to succeed professionally and personally.

Winkofsky says Sabol excels in leadership because her colleagues and clients feel like she wants the best for everyone she interacts with.

"She treats everybody with respect, she listens, and you always get a sense from her that she has their best interest front of mind, whether that be a client or a peer or someone she's mentoring," he says.

And for Sabol it is personal, Winkofsky says. "A lot of times, people draw a line between personal and professional relationships, but Martha has relationships with her clients and her peers—they are meaningful and lifelong relationships," he adds.

"It's not super easy to build those types of

relationships and maintain them, but she's able to do that in a very genuine way."

WHAT'S CHANGED

When people used to think of the gaming industry, casinos in Atlantic City and Las Vegas probably came to mind. Now it's so much more, Sabol says.

One of the most challenging parts of her job is keeping up with the emerging gaming industry and how it compares across different countries.

"It's not an industry that you sit and idly deal with things," she says. "You have to keep up on technology and what's going on internationally."

The last year was incredibly busy as the firm spent a good amount of time in Japan, understanding the culture and what Japan is looking for in its development of integrated resorts.

"What's happening internationally is very different from what's happening in the United States," she says.

Internet gaming in Europe and the United Kingdom is very prevalent, whereas in the United States it has been very slow to be introduced, she says.

"I thought it would be more widely accepted, but it has not had the growth we were expecting and hoping for," Sabol says.

The firm is in a unique position to support clients with new types of online gaming because of their consistent work overseas, where things may be advancing more quickly.

"(In developing a global platform) we're tapping into our resources around the world as we hope to be an example for other practice areas within our firm and the legal community," Sabol says. "We're hoping other industries can learn from what we're doing and be a benefit to the clients."

LIKE MOTHER, LIKE DAUGHTER

Since the beginning, Sabol's daughter Kathryn has watched her mom pave the way to her own success. This time, it's Sabol's turn to watch her daughter pave her own way. Now 24, Kathryn lives and works in Chicago.

When Kathryn was in college, the two had a conversation her mother won't soon forget.

Sabol reminded her daughter that this was her education and her opportunity to do what she wanted. She told her daughter to "be happy and just don't let anyone define you."

"Then Kathryn said, 'Mom, no one is going to distract me. I've been watching you my whole life, and I've seen you excel and do things. I'm going to be the very best person I can be.'

"As a parent, I don't think I could have heard anything better in the world," Sabol says. ■