



Photo by Kevin Hennack

ASKED & ANSWERED

FRANK PASTERNAK

The things you do in high school can have a profound affect on your future. Frank Pasternak, managing partner of Pasternak & Zirgibel SC in Brookfield, can attest to that.

One simple exercise in a high school class helped set the course of his life.

During Pasternak's junior year, he participated in a mock trial as part of a sociology class. Although he had never thought of being a lawyer before, that exercise helped him make up his mind and he never looked back.

"I loved it," Pasternak said. "It was a blast. And I always had it in the back of my mind from that point on that I was interested in going to law school."

Today, he's an 18-year veteran litigator focusing on personal injury and wrongful death cases.

Although Pasternak knew he wanted to be a litigator, personal injury was not an area of law he had initially planned to pursue. Prior to law school, he had an impression of that practice as "ambulance chasers who did too much advertising on television."

His perception changed after college when he worked as an errand clerk for a personal injury firm in Chicago. He saw the lawyers assisting people who needed life care following catastrophic accidents.

"It was eye-opening in terms of the quality of work they did, the kind of people they represented, and what personal injury attorneys really did," he said.

Pasternak has tried to bring that attitude to his own practice and to the firm that he has run for the past 10 years. Rather than taking a factory approach to churning through cases, he has tried to take the time to choose cases that he feels good about.

"We don't try to gun for volume in cases," Pasternak said. "We try to make sure we are getting involved in a good case with good people."

Pasternak took time out of his busy practice to participate in this week's Asked & Answered.

Mock trials sparked Pasternak's passion for law

Tony Anderson, *Special to Wisconsin Law Journal*

Wisconsin Law Journal: What is the best thing you can do to prepare for court?

Frank Pasternak: It's overstated, but I think prepare, prepare, prepare is really it. Lack of preparation will force you to overreach and to not be comfortable. And I think being comfortable in the courtroom is incredibly important.

WLJ: What is the worst thing you can do in court?

Pasternak: Trying to be someone you are not. Not being authentic and not being comfortable with yourself in the courtroom.

WLJ: What is the best part of being a lawyer?

Pasternak: Helping people who really need my help.

WLJ: What was the best thing you learned in law school?

Pasternak: Law school teaches you to be on top of your work and be prepared.

WLJ: What is your favorite thing to do in Wisconsin?

Pasternak: Enjoy our lakes. We have a cottage and going with our family to the lake is absolutely wonderful.

WLJ: What is your most prized possession?

Pasternak: My law firm. It took a lot of work to get here.

WLJ: What is your idea of perfect happiness?

Pasternak: Being with my family whether it's

on vacation, at church or at our cottage — simply being with my family and enjoying quality family time.

WLJ: What is your favorite book?

Pasternak: One of my favorite books is "The Millionaire Next Door." It talks about entrepreneurs and how they are actually quite thrifty people.

WLJ: What is your greatest fear?

Pasternak: The unknown; things you can't prepare for.

WLJ: What famous person you would most like to have a drink with?

Pasternak: My family recently went to Rome and I found the Vatican absolutely breathtaking. If I was going to sit down and have a drink with someone it would probably be the Pope so I could talk with him about the Vatican.

WLJ: What was your favorite toy as a kid?

Pasternak: I always like these things called Corgies. They were toy cars, and as a child you couldn't get me away from them.

WLJ: Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

Pasternak: Probably simple words like "good."

WLJ: What trait do you most like in others?

Pasternak: Authenticity — people who are themselves, who don't put on any kind of facade.