



DEREK BUSH, CARSON PROCTOR, MEGAN RUSSELL AND JOSEF HESS

# Jacksonville Rissman

## A Lesson in Leadership

BY SUSAN CUSHING

**T**here seems to be some debate over whether leaders are born or made. It doesn't really matter if the leadership is sound and extends to mentoring of others. Such is the case with attorney Derek Bush of Rissman, Barrett, Hurt, Donahue, McLain & Mangan. Now celebrating their 50th anniversary serving Florida, this is a venerated firm with a progressive edge.

The firm proudly rebranded in 2021 with the slogan "Rissman Resolves." With that new moniker came new opportunities, such as clients asking them to expand their reach to other areas of the state. When they decided to add a fifth location, they handpicked Bush to lead the way. As the managing partner of the Jacksonville office, Bush concentrates his practice on medical malpractice defense, product liability, auto negligence, construction liability and premise liability. Aside from being a highly successful attorney, Bush has proven to be an innovative and inspirational leader. It's a role that seems to



come naturally.

In fact, his influence is in no small part due to why this relatively new office has already exceeded all expectations already requiring additional office space to house the rapidly growing staff. It seems that Bush extends the same sincere concern and attention to those who work for him as he does his numerous and faithful clients.

Attracting the best of the best among attorneys is a highly competitive experience, however, it takes only a brief conversation with Bush for potential hires to decide this is the office where they want to launch or expand their career.

"I interviewed with Derek first," says associate Carson Proctor, "and the way that he described his management style and the kind of work that we do here was exactly what I wanted in a law firm. Within the first 10 minutes of the interview, I was sold. Derek is a great leader, and he wants to make sure that everyone on the staff is comfortable and without stress. It's important to me that he offers his associates the opportunity to grow and learn."

As any attorney will attest, stress tends to be part of the job description. When you're taking on the problems and oftentimes fate of others, the responsibility can be very stressful. While there is no magic formula for removing this aspect of the work, Bush has found a way to help alleviate as much of this as possible.

"The firm's leadership has taken steps to spread out the tasks and responsibilities over our administrative

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resources, and what was a very challenging part of the job has become significantly less so," he says. "Our administrative staff take a lot of those burdens off the lawyers. My assistant, Lori Koedel, has been with me for more than a decade. She works with me remotely from our Tampa office and is integral to every part of this office's operations. Additionally, we have two legal assistants, Christine Hatt and Joanna Charoubi, who took a chance, left their old firms, and joined this young office to help chart the direction that it will take. The success of this office is shared with our staff members – without them, none of this expansion happens."



CARSON PROCTOR AND JOANNA CHAROUBI



JOSEF HESS

Taking on the responsibility of opening a new office can be a foreboding endeavor in any situation, but when you're representing a longstanding, highly reputed firm such as Rissman, the pressure can be even greater. Bush contends that he never felt this burden thanks to the support and guidance he'd received from senior partners.

I was fortunate to start in our Tampa office which was an incredible learning experience with some amazing partners like Ted Copeland, Cliff Acord and Richard Mangan. They generously gave me their time, answering all my questions, and their doors always remained open. I knew that I wanted to do the same for the next generation of attorneys in our firm. I want to participate in the training process for our new lawyers and I couldn't have been more excited when the firm presented me with this opportunity to open our Jacksonville office."

Bush is also quick to point out that, unlike many firms with long histories, even after 50 years, Rissman continues to be forward-thinking and always nurturing the next generation of attorneys.

"Something that I believe truly makes this firm unique is that there are many shareholders within the firm who have been practicing a long time, and they may be within three, five, ten years of retirement, but they are still making active investments in the future of the firm," he says. "This office is the most physical and recent manifestation of that. They are extending



■ MEGAN RUSSELL, DEREK BUSH, CARSON PROCTOR AND JOSEF HESS

vast resources to open this office, hiring new staff and train new attorney; they are planting trees they'll never enjoy the shade of. They want this firm to last another 50 years and that selfless commitment on their part is special.

"I tell them as often as I can how much I appreciate the fact that they're making this investment for the future of the firm and entrusting it to me and the other attorneys who are taking this ride with me," Bush adds.

His associates concur.

"The culture of this firm was very important to me," says associate Megan Russell. "I feel that the typical law firm feel is just not with the times. The culture here is very collaborative, inclusive with an open-door policy. Whenever you have a question or just having a rough day, you can walk into someone's office and ask a question, talk about what you can do to be a better lawyer, or just talk about everyday life. It makes my job so much easier. Derek's management style is definitely

a huge part of what makes this such a great firm to be part of. The biggest thing is Rissman allows their attorneys to develop. They allow any associate who believes they are ready and are able, to practice law, participate taking depositions or whatever, and not just watch."

Associate Josef Hess agrees. "I'm very excited about the growth of the firm," he says, "but even more importantly is how they are committed to being proactive, to keep the firm moving in a forward-thinking way and keep up with the times. They stay ahead of the curve instead of being reactive and I think that's absolutely great."

Although the associates and entire administrative staff are quick to laud how fantastic a leader he is, Bush shies away from taking too much credit. Rather, he points to those working in the Jacksonville office saying they are the reason for its success.

"I can't tell you how lucky I feel for the attorneys I have here," he says. "They are all eager to keep learning more and I tell them all the time, my job is to grease the wheels of your career, to make sure you are getting as far and as fast as you want. I give them as much responsibility as they want to handle, but I'll never put them in a spot where they can do anything that we can't handle. I think that we have a good system set up to support these really talented young lawyers."

And the results of this trust in the office's young lawyers? Immediate results for their clients. Bush reports that their office has already resolved nearly 40% of the files that have been sent to them in only their first 10 months, a great deal of them as a direct result of the focus and determination of this group of young attorneys.

"These are young lawyers – but extremely talented ones. They are already handling depositions, settlement conferences, and dispositive motions – with great results including outright dismissals," Bush says. "I am proud of the group that we have here, and their commitment to their personal growth and the success of this office."

While office hours may be long, Bush says he tries to keep his weekends free for family. He and his wife have a 7-year-old son who Bush describes as a die-hard hockey player. "Believe it or not, we spend a lot of time traveling throughout the state of Florida following his hockey team," he says. "Being in litigation is demanding on your time during the week, so I try to make a conscious effort when I'm home, I'm home. I want my staff and attorneys to have that same balance."

Already an obvious success, the Jacksonville team will soon be moving into larger office space. So, what does Bush think about his accomplishments here?

"I love our culture and attitude. I'm excited for the future of the office and the attorneys I have here. I remind them that their successes are the firm's successes. They have shown incredible growth and accomplishments in the first year we have been here, and I think there is only more to come."

## AT A GLANCE

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