

Entrepreneur Profile



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Debra Schoenberg: Principal and Founder, Schoenberg Family Law Group P.C.

What it does: Divorce, separation, alimony, child support and custody, pre- and post-nuptial agreements.

HQ: San Francisco

Employees: 15.

Founded: 2009.

Source of startup capital: Self-financed.

Background: Studied philosophy at Western College in Ohio. Earned a law degree from the University of New Hampshire. Founded family law practices in Upstate New York and Vermont. Ran Schoenberg and Associates in Burlington, Vt., for 20 years before starting Schoenberg Family Law in San Francisco.

Age: 54.

Residence: San Francisco and Berkeley.

Web site: sflg.com

Big picture

How's business: Business has been fantastic. We have been growing carefully and incrementally every year.

Biggest challenge for your business: Our clients are going through one of the most challenging periods in their lives, so helping them through this is challenging, but rewarding.

What's going to change at your company in the next year: We've outgrown our offices, and we'll move in January.

Hiring: We're hiring two additional associates soon.

Business moves

Reason for starting business: I felt that I was the star pitcher on a farm team. I wanted to see how I would do in a bigger market. I wanted to be more challenged intellectually.

Most difficult part of decision: Taking and passing the bar exam again.

Biggest misconception: That divorce lawyers are interchangeable. The diligence in our work makes a big difference. It's the thoroughness that we bring that sets us apart.

Biggest business strength: The depth of our bench — myself and eight associates and paralegals. We negotiate strong. I wish for every client that they could resolve their cases outside the courtroom.

Biggest business weakness: Right now I wish we had more associates. People are working harder than I want them to.

Biggest risk: Selling a tremendously vibrant practice in Vermont to move to the Bay Area.

Biggest mistake: I just invested in some practice management software, it does not sync up with our calendars. So in spite of the time and effort we put into the software, it does not work.



Smartest move: Selling on the East Coast, and moving to San Francisco.

Biggest worry: Anything that will diminish the quality of the work that we do. I never want our reputation to diminish.

Work routine

Most challenging task: My failure to clone myself. Juggling demands of clients and the court, running a successful practice, hiring, continuing to serve our clients' needs.

Favorite task: Strategizing with my associates on best approaches to complicated cases.

Least favorite task: Some of our clients come in having hired another law firm first. Trying to untangle and fix the tasks that a prior counsel might have made.

Biggest frustration: That there are only 24 hours in a day.

Source of support in a business crisis: I'm blessed to have a very wide and strong circle of friends and colleagues.

Dreams

Key goal yet to achieve: Professionally I want to keep on doing what I'm doing, even in year 28 of doing this.

Five-year plan: Work a little less and enjoy more things outside the office.

Inducement to sell: Not until retirement.

Personals

Role model: Lyndon Johnson.

Favorite pastimes: Hanging out with my two children. And anything outdoors.

Favorite book: Anything by Nathan Englander.

Favorite film: Just saw "The Quartet" and loved it.

Favorite restaurant: The Trident.

Favorite Bay Area business: First Republic Bank.

Favorite music: Opera, Bach.

Automobile: BMW 328i. I dream about a Porsche.