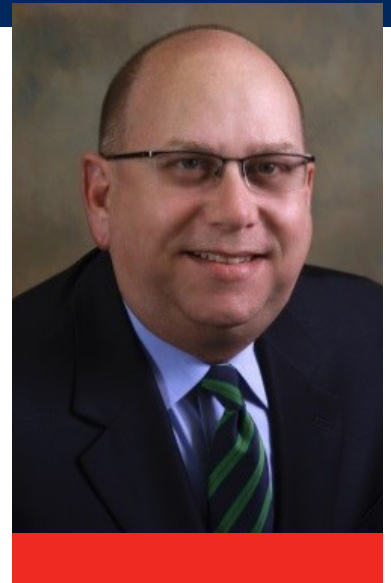


Quick wit and self-effacing style serve Fresno attorney very well



By Brian Cox

Attorney Darryl Horowitz takes his clients' problems very seriously. Himself, maybe not so much.

"If you can't laugh about yourself, you're not the right person for this firm," he says.

With a quick, dry wit that bends toward the sarcastic, the co-founder of Coleman & Horowitz, LLP, in Fresno, Calif., always seems to have a wry quip at hand.



Darryl Horowitz with managing partner Gregory J. Norys and partner David J. Weiland foster a work environment that includes an element of humor and fun.

"My father used to joke, we were an iron and steel company," he deadpans when talking of his upbringing in Long Beach, Calif. "My mom irons and my dad steals."

Horowitz's father was actually a naval tailor who for many years operated a naval tailor shop that his grandfather Julius opened in the early 1930s after arriving in Long Beach from Brooklyn, N.Y. After the shop closed, Horowitz's father, Lee, worked as a manufacturer's representative for a uniform company. His mother, a former dancer, was a housewife.

"As I joke, I scratched and clawed my way to the middle," says Horowitz.

With strict parents who stressed education and demanded good grades, Horowitz says he and his siblings were "trained to go to college." His father, who was an Eagle Scout, also encouraged his sons to become involved in Boy Scouts, which proved to have a lasting influence on Horowitz personally and professionally. He was a Life Scout and was an honor scout.

"I learned to be altruistic," says Horowitz. "I learned that I like helping people."

Other than his parents, a significant person during Horowitz's childhood was his father's sister, Aunt Phyllis, who was a high school physical education teacher. In addition to taking him to Paul Newman and James Bond movies, she taught him to play tennis when he was 8. The sport became a lifelong passion. He played through high school and college and into adulthood.

"I think learning how to play tennis taught me how to win and lose gracefully," says Horowitz. "I also learned how to identify behaviors of other people and appreciated the need to work hard."

Though he thought for a while that he might become a doctor, Horowitz says an incident at Boy Scout camp involving a kid slicing his hand open with an X-acto knife drove that ambition from his mind. It was through working at Legal Aid while at Long Beach State that Horowitz's attention was first drawn to the law.

As he was approaching his third year at Western State University College of Law, Horowitz secured an externship as a clerk with a law firm that had its office in a building that

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accommodated several other individual and small law firms. Though he started clerking for one lawyer, it wasn't long before other lawyers had work for him, and before he knew it, he was putting in a full 40-hour week.

The opportunity to gain hands-on experience as a 3L was invaluable.

"I actually drafted pleadings, motions, trial briefs, responded to motions and prepared written discovery," he says. "In the first year I had more experience than anyone I knew. When I started practicing, I already knew how to do a lot."

His first job out of law school was with a small firm where he quickly took on the responsibility of developing a bank as a client. He was with the firm for only a year when he decided to leave after a family issue arose and the partners showed little concern for his family responsibilities.

"I'm very old fashioned in that sense," says Horowitz. "I believe family is important. It's important to spend time with your family because if you don't like who you are, you won't like what you do and you won't do well for your clients."

It is a philosophy he has carried over into the firms he started.

As he branched out on his own, the banks he represented followed. He negotiated a time-for-space arrangement with the firm he had clerked with as a law student. In exchange for 30 hours a month, the firm afforded him an office and the use of a secretary. It was enough for Horowitz to get his feet under him.

"I was pretty busy pretty fast," he recalls. "I believe that if you service clients well and try to be as efficient as you can, then you'll have more clients than you can handle."

And he did. So, in response, Horowitz entered into an association with a colleague and began growing his first litigation and transaction firm, a mere two years out of law school.

Around the same time, the young lawyer set out to start a family. He married his wife, Erika, in 1987. She is now a retired schoolteacher, and the couple have two children. Their daughter, Andrea, is a product manager and graphic designer who recently launched her own marketing company; and their son Aaron, 33, attended paralegal school and is now considering law school.

After nearly a decade, the firm he joined after moving from Southern California to Fresno dissolved and the partners went their separate ways. Horowitz initially thought he would work with another firm, but his wife urged him to go into practice with Bill Coleman when Coleman reached out to Horowitz with the idea of starting a new firm in 1994.

"She's an outstanding judge of character," says Horowitz. "She knows the good lawyers from the arrogant ones."

His wife's judgment proved spot on.

As the new partners set about building Coleman & Horowitz, LLP, they followed the philosophy of growing only when necessary and they instituted the "Baseball Rule" when it came to hiring.

"We asked ourselves if this was somebody we'd want to invite to a baseball game or over to our house for a fun dinner," explains Horowitz. "You're at the firm more than you're at home sometimes, and you want to be around people that you can respect and admire."

The firm started with three lawyers and three staff in 1994 and has since grown to a size of 50 employees, including 23 attorneys, with six offices around the state. Horowitz, who was managing partner more than 25 years, says the focus became "wanting to become the firm of choice."

"Our goal was to be where clients wanted to take their case because we treat them fairly, and where attorneys want to practice, and employees want to work," says Horowitz. "If you have the right culture, employees adopt the culture, and we get people who want to stay because they like it."

The best test of a healthy law firm, he says, is if people can work there, are happy there, and can retire from there.

The culture Horowitz and Coleman fostered from the beginning was one where the focus was on strong client relationships and



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the aim was to hold consistently high standards while still having time for family. They wanted a firm that wasn't "stuffy" and where everyone felt they were working with purpose and reason.

The firm is attentive to forging relationships and creating a work atmosphere that is friendly and welcoming. A masseuse comes in once a month to offer massages. The firm hosts weekly attorney lunches and quarterly lunches and holiday dinners for staff.

Horowitz says the success of the firm rests in the fact that it is client-focused and client-driven.

"If you treat your clients and opposing counsel like you would want to be treated, you'll do okay," says Horowitz. "A good law firm doesn't happen by accident."