

TEXAS LAWYER

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Texas Legal Awards: 2019 Professional Excellence

Lifetime Achievement: William Finnegan IV, Latham & Watkins LLP

William Finnegan IV, a partner in Latham & Watkins' Houston office, is a pioneer in the energy industry, known for shepherding high-profile matters for some of the largest energy companies in the world, with a focus on midstream master limited partnerships (MLPs). He has advised on all of Energy Transfer's securities work and most of their M&A transactions over the last decade, including its \$18 billion acquisition of Regency Energy Partners, which at the time, made Energy Transfer the second-largest MLP in the world. Last year, Finnegan guided dozens of energy deals valued at more than \$199 billion.

What is the biggest change you've seen in the profession during your career?

The rapid advancement of technology, which goes hand-in-hand with greater access to information and an escalating pace of work, has really changed the landscape.

Lawyers today enjoy instant access to information and communication in a way that would have sounded like science fiction a few decades ago. The trick is to skillfully harness the technology to improve your practice and benefit your clients, and not let it get in the way of building the personal relationships and hard skills that will allow you to thrive in this line of work.

What is one thing about the profession that has remained unchanged over the years?

Clients ask us to apply a specific set of skills to their business decisions and they expect nothing less than excellence in our execution. I don't think that will ever change—and I fully agree with this high standard. Paying attention to every detail, while thinking creatively and strategically about the client's business problems—if you can do both and enjoy both, the opportunities to learn and grow are limitless.

What is one piece of advice you would give someone entering into the profession that you wish you had as a young lawyer?

Personal relationships really matter. You need to invest in people, and you need people to invest in you to truly succeed.



Every successful person I know benefited from the guidance and support of mentors, especially early in their career. Mentorship cannot simply be assigned or assumed—it's something you need to seek out and be open to, and ultimately, commit to.

Client relationships are critical too, of course, and so are good relationships with opposing counsel. You never know where opportunities are going to come from. I often get referrals from people I have worked across from on a deal because we enjoy the working relationship and respect each other as people and professionals—even if we aggravate each other from time to time while pushing hard for our clients' interests. Striving to develop authentic, positive personal relationships, regardless of seniority or role, not only helps you grow your practice – it makes practicing law a lot more enjoyable. To borrow a line from Latham's Chair, Rich Trobman, you can be nice and still be successful. ■