

The Millennial Who Is Now Running an NLJ 500 Firm

At 36, James Goodnow is taking the reins of Fennemore Craig, with an eye toward technology and innovation.

By **Ben Seal** | **UPDATED** Mar 02, 2018 at 10:37 AM



James Goodnow of Fennemore Craig.

James Goodnow, the fast-rising 36-year-old who joined Fennemore Craig's management committee two years ago, has been elected managing partner of the Phoenix-based NLJ 500 firm. He is set to take the reins from Stephen Good on April 1, making him one of the youngest lawyers to run a large American law firm.

As the shock wore off this week, Goodnow, who started at the firm as a minimum-wage file clerk in college and admitted he "had never contemplated that I would be in this position," was already preparing for the future.

"What gets me excited, as a baseline proposition, is that the job allows me to interact with the people at the firm much more than I ever did," Goodnow said. "I get to have conversations with people here about what moves them, what motivates them, what they think needs to be improved."

For Goodnow, many of those conversations are about how to use technology to the firm's advantage—and how to adjust to the ways it is reshaping the legal profession. He sees both facets as essential to preparing Fennemore Craig, a 194-lawyer firm that ranked 210th in the country last year by head count, for the new normal.

"Lawyers can say the problems we deal with are unique to our industry, but that's just not true," Goodnow said. "Technology has torn apart industries, and law firms have to draw upon the best practices from our own clients to make sure that doesn't happen to us as law firms."

Goodnow has been making the rounds in an effort to learn more about how other leaders—in the law and beyond—use innovative models to help their organizations keep pace in an era of rapid change. In addition to meeting with John Quinn of Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, Ellison Turner of Irell & Manella, and Kevin Broyles and James Fisher II of virtual law firm FisherBroyles, he recently took a trip to online retailer Zappos' Las Vegas headquarters to see how the company operates.

"The world is changing really quickly, and we'll have to do the same," he said.

Among those changes, Fennemore Craig has launched an innovation committee looking for new ways to generate revenue. The committee has already led to the launch of a blockchain practice group, and it's looking closely at getting more aggressive with alternative fee arrangements and cloud-based lawyering.

Goodnow is thinking about more than just technology, though. He's focused on pushing the firm forward and bridging the gap between its older and younger attorneys.

"I'm not here just to represent people of my age or generation," Goodnow said. "I'm here to keep the firm strong. But I do think that being on the younger end of the spectrum can be helpful."

So what does a millennial do to celebrate when he scales a mountain few in his generation have even considered climbing? In Goodnow's case, he treats himself to a treadmill desk.

"I keep some running shoes in my desk and I plop them on when I have a break," he said. "I use it as my time to go through emails."

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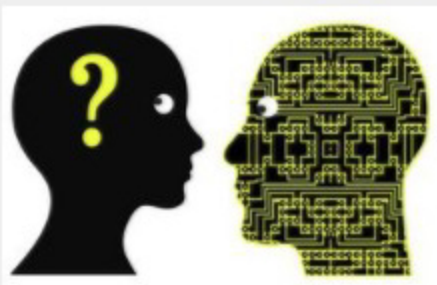


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