



# Colleagues in Law

*A Celebration of Alumni Achievement*



## **Marla Robinson**

Class of 1987  
Dean's Counselor

### **1. Of what success are you most proud?**

Of professional success, I'm most proud of opening and building my own firm. When I left my mother and uncles' firm, I had children involved in sports. I wanted more flexibility with my time so I wouldn't miss my children's important events. I had intended to be a sole practitioner, but when my uncle said, "I just don't see you building a firm," my mind responded, "don't tell me I can't do that." I've been building the firm ever since.

### **2. What does being a Western State alum mean to you?**

I'm a fourth generation Orange County resident, so it ties into the pride of Orange County for me. My mom was one of the Western State graduates who did the joint BA/JD degree back when it was offered. She couldn't have done that without the type of program Western State offered. It was somewhat similar with me in that I worked, fell in love three months into my first semester, got married and had my daughter while attending. Western State's programs that provided evening and weekend classes allowed me to accomplish everything.

### **3. What do you like most about the practice of law?**

This may sound silly. My motto at work is, "Fighting for Capitalism." I love to be part of helping clients grow their businesses in an environment that seems to attack their efforts. Also, I am blessed to have the

greatest clients ever who I'm honored to also call my friends. One of my biggest (in revenues with the firm) clients I've known since I was 9 years old. I worked for him after college and throughout law school. Another large client used to be my neighbor and our children have grown up together.

**4. What do you like least?**

Litigation. I personally haven't litigated in over 15 years. I am thankful that my partner, James Jackson, another Western State graduate, handles that part of the practice perfectly.

**5. How has the practice of law changed from when you first started?**

It's changed a lot. Remember, I come from a family of lawyers—both my mom and two uncles. We just changed our letterhead from the old fashioned style; we have a logo now! And it's in color!

The greatest difference now, is that people review information on the internet and believe it to be true. I receive calls from individuals who are convinced that they know the law because they read about it online. I often have to tell them they were reading Federal law which is sometimes, especially in the employment law area, very different than California law. The Legal Zoom type businesses have actually resulted in increased business for our firm because we correct their mistakes and more often their lack of completing a project.

**6. How do you view Western State's position in the legal community?**

Western State has an excellent position now. That's evolved over time. We've always had more sitting judges than any other OC law school. That's always made me proud of Western State, although it seems to be a little known fact in the community. When the school secured ABA approval, the community seemed to take note and consider Western State among the top law schools in the community.

**7. What do you see as the most important/pressing issue in the legal system?**

Lack of funding for the courts. Since I don't litigate, it's not my most pressing issue, but in the system, it seems to be. Everything takes so much longer, and it's that much more expensive for the client.

**8. What is your first memory of Western State?**

That's easy. My first memory of Western State was meeting my mom at the school for lunch because I attended high school next door. My first memory related to my attending was a little later. I was on my way to Cal State Fullerton to apply to enroll in an MBA program focusing on finance. I graduated in 1982, and the economy was very much like our last recession, so I made a similar choice as many recent graduates who had few jobs to choose from and decided to go back to school. I remember driving up

State College with Cal State Fullerton on the right and Western State on the left. I figured I would drop in to the law school and just talk to them. After all, I'd spent my whole life responding to the question, "Are you going to be a lawyer like your mom and your uncles?" My mother was valedictorian of her class and very well liked. The staff in admissions practically begged me to enroll. When you are 22 years old and someone expresses that much of an interest in you, you take notice and get excited

**9. What are your favorite memories?**

That's hard... I have so many good memories. . Probably graduation—no—THIS is my favorite: Judge Gary Ryan, one of our favorite instructors, was teaching Remedies our last year. My friend, Emily Quinlan, skipped a Saturday class to go to the race track, and she won big. Professor Ryan's response the following Saturday class , was, "Your punishment is you are buying drinks after class for the whole class." And she did.

**10. Are the businesses you counsel primarily local, regional or national?**

Our clients are primarily local although we have quite a few clients who have operations nationally.

**11. What is the distinction between doing business in Orange County now versus when you started practicing?**

I really have not noticed a distinction between doing business in Orange County now versus when I started practicing as it relates to my practice other than what all businesses deal with in constant and new regulations that makes businesses more expensive to run.

**12. What are the qualities of a good transactional practitioner?**

Litigation and business experience. As a litigator you learn how your transaction and the documents describing it will be attacked. When you learn these threats, you are better at drafting to avoid them. The members of my firm all have business experience which, I believe, makes us better lawyers. You have an advantage over other lawyers when you've actually had to read a financial statement, report to a board of directors, have a budget and the like.

**13. How are the fortunes of the local economy reflected in your practice, and where do you see that economy going during the coming year?**

The question is the answer. The local economy, while even at its worst, has always had good fortune. We are blessed to live in a community that thrives even in bad economic times. Our community seems to come out of every adversity stronger than ever. That has been the case with my practice. After each downturn, it grows even stronger. I see slow and steady growth for the year ahead. Our practice's growth this last year has allowed us to better serve our clients with the addition of my partner, Paula Clarkson, an

estate planning specialist. Her specialty is a natural tie in for our business clients in helping their wealth preservation and transfer.

**14. What qualities does your firm bring to the table that clients are not likely to get from large firms?**

As I stated earlier, all of the lawyers in our firm have business experience. This is a quality that clients are not likely to get from other attorneys in firms large and small. Unfortunately, many attorneys graduate from high school and go straight to college and then law school with no practical experience in the business world. Many law students believe they are fortunate if they get a position as a law clerk. In my opinion, if they are going to practice business law they'd be better off in a job in just about any other business than law.

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