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Mayer Brown's New LA Head On The Office's Future

By Rachel Rippetoe

Law360 (July 9, 2021, 4:34 PM EDT) -- Mayer Brown LLP promoted long-time partner John Nadolenco to lead the firm's Los Angeles office, succeeding partner Phil Recht, who helmed the office for more than a decade.

Nadolenco, who previously served as a member of the firm's partnership board and as co-leader of the firm's litigation and dispute resolution practice, has taken over as managing partner of the Los Angeles office this month, the firm announced this week. Recht will continue working for the firm as a co-leader of Mayer Brown's public policy, regulatory and political law practice.

Law360 Pulse sat down with Nadolenco to chat about his plans for the office, which hosts 61 attorneys, including 19 partners. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Tell me a little bit about your journey rising up through the firm. You've been with Mayer Brown for more than two decades now, since 1995, right?

That is true. I'm a Mayer Brown lifer. And I definitely think that being a Mayer Brown lifer, it gives me an interesting perspective and insight into not just the Los Angeles office, but also the firm as a whole, and how the legal industry has changed, both globally and within LA.

Individually, my own practice has always focused on class action defense and other kinds of high stakes cases. And Mayer Brown has, especially after we grew by combining with Johnson Stokes & Masters in Asia, and Rowe & Maw in Europe, and through our association with Tauil & Chequer in South America, we've become a true international, global powerhouse with a really impressive platform. But we've always maintained our local strengths in our existing offices. And I've benefited from that platform. And in my new role, part of my goal is to ensure that everyone in our office and elsewhere also benefits from the platform.

And you've been in Los Angeles during your entire tenure with Mayer Brown? How has its West Coast practice changed with the times?

I've always been housed in the Los Angeles office, but it's really my management roles that have given me insights into the firm as a whole. So just kind of proving if you stay in one place long enough, they make you head of something — I was, at some point, head of litigation within LA. Then I became one of the heads for the global litigation department. I was also elected to the law firm's partnership board, which helped me have visibility across the entire global platform of Mayer Brown. That was the last

position I held before this one.

I think it's fair to say we have seen the practice just become far more national and far more global. If you just look at my own practice, yes, I've been housed in the Los Angeles office, and I have a number of cases in LA courts, but most of my cases are across the country. And we'll also do work in Los Angeles for our global clients. We have several cases, for example, and transactions for Hong Kong-based entities that are doing deals in the state. And those are being run and handled out of our Los Angeles office. So the practice itself has definitely become more national and global in scope.

In terms of the LA office, what are your business goals for the next year? What will be your metrics for success?

First and foremost, Phil Recht was a transformational leader for LA. He has built an incredibly strong foundation, and my goal is to build on the great platform that he and his team created. I've got three core priorities. One is just ambitious growth, not just in Southern California, but also in Northern California. I benefit from my insights into the firm strategy. And I know a core part of Mayer Brown's strategy is to grow in California. And I hope that my knowledge of the market as well as the value of our one-firm culture and how people can benefit from our global platform, I hope that we can translate that into really ambitious growth. And I see us growing from our strengths.

One of the things Phil did so well is he really focused on our core practices, the practices that the LA market supports, which include litigation, real estate, corporate, tax. We have a really unique government practice. So I think one of my priorities would be to grow from those strengths, but also expand into key target areas in particular in the California market, and those would be things like technology and life sciences. I would like to see us continue to grow in those areas.

My other two priorities, the second one is diversity. Our office is actually already pretty incredibly diverse, and it's something we have valued as a firm. There is no question that our clients benefit from the firm's diversity of thought, whether it's generational or cultural. I benefit from that kind of diversity of thought. Everyone does. And one of the goals is to continue to build on the various Mayer Brown diversity initiatives and to find creative ways to tie them all together and see if we can develop even more unique diversity programs out here.

The third priority is to continue to emphasize our firm's collaborative one-firm culture. I've been super fortunate in that my practice, and just in my own management responsibilities have shown me firsthand that culture and how it can benefit individual practices.

I want to just continue to ensure that our lawyers, and not just the lawyers, but our staff, are seamlessly integrated across our firm's offices, our regions and our practices, because our integrated global platform is definitely one of our most valuable assets. It's what makes Mayer Brown unique. And it's what we find really attracts lateral lawyers to our firm in our offices.

What's an example of a diversity initiative you're interested in implementing?

One of the examples I can think of is, I went to a remarkably diverse law school. I went to American University. And so one of the programs, I actually helped put together, stems from a meeting that Paul Theiss, our former chairman, and I actually had with eBay. They were commenting on Mayer Brown's impressive diversity metrics. And they said, "How can we partner with you better to achieve diversity, to kind of highlight diversity goals that both of our organizations clearly believe in?"

And six months later, I ended up at a dinner with the dean of American University's law school. And she said to me, we're making a big push into Silicon Valley. I wonder if you could be helpful to us in the Valley, and introduce us to some of your connections. And so one conversation led to another, and we put together a diversity collaborative, where we hired a diverse lawyer out of American University's law school. She worked at eBay, part time, half of the summer, and she then worked for Mayer Brown the other half of the summer, and now she's a full-fledged Mayer Brown associate. It was a win-win-win, especially for diversity.

What's the hiring market like in LA right now and what's your value proposition to potential laterals?

I think the one-firm culture we were just talking about, that's our value proposition. And we work around the world for truly global clients. We work around the country for truly national clients. We really do have an amazing culture of collaboration and team spirit within Mayer Brown. And so if you're a lateral who thinks your practice could grow if it were more national or more global, because of our teamwork-based approach, we're definitely a firm you should be considering.

Are you actively looking to recruit more attorneys to the office? What does growth look like to you?

There are no set metrics. I don't have a goal of we need to grow X%, we need to grow Y%, or we need to add this many bodies. What I can tell you is the goal is absolutely ambitious growth in California, including in Southern California. And I know the firm is dedicated to it, and has made it a strategic priority, but it's not going to just be growth for growth's sake, it's going to be growth, because it makes sense for our clients. And because it makes sense for our law firm. And equally important, because it makes sense for the laterals that we're talking to.

Many firms seem to be drawn to the Southern California region right now. What are the benefits of really having a robust practice in that area, and why do you think the urgency to grow in that area has changed in the last couple of years?

Two forces I've seen develop in California over the years are just the presence of more national or global disputes and transactions. Our clients in Brazil or Europe, just because of time zones, as well as our Hong Kong and Asian offices, believe it or not, makes Los Angeles relatively attractive. It's the least bad time zone that works for them.

And we have also seen that the tech world has moved down the coast. We can see Silicon Beach emerging up and having a number of startups, and now they're not even startups, they're established tech firms in their own right.

You're also starting to see a lot more life sciences. Traditionally, you've seen that in, in true Southern California, like the San Diego area, the Irvine area, but you're starting to see more and more of it in Los Angeles, or even those companies having offices in Los Angeles. Those continue to be growth areas for us. So the more globally-connected clients, and the tech clients really match the footprint and the goals of Mayer Brown.

--Editing by Alyssa Miller.