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Q&A With Mayer Brown's Daniel Ring

Law360, New York (June 02, 2009) -- Daniel L. Ring is a partner in the Chicago office of Mayer Brown LLP and action group leader of the firm's product liability and mass torts practice.

Ring is a litigator and corporate adviser whose practice is focused on commercial and tort litigation. He has experience in all phases of litigation involving product liability, mass and toxic torts, and complex commercial disputes in state, federal and multidistrict proceedings.

Q: What is the most challenging case you've worked on, and why?

A: Several years ago I was called upon to help try a massive consolidated asbestos trial in West Virginia on relatively short notice to implement a defense that our team had put together in just a few months.

Stepping into the world of asbestos litigation where seemingly normal rules do not always apply in such a tough jurisdiction for defendants was quite a challenge. I faced those who had litigated asbestos cases their entire careers and expected to win.

The potential risk to the client was enormous, but in working closely with local counsel, we had success at trial and limited or excluded much of the evidence offered.

I was then able to argue for and obtain a directed verdict for our client and then defended it against post-trial attacks. That was then and still is a rare defense win in a mass trial setting.

Q: What accomplishment as an attorney are you most proud of?

A: Aside from the asbestos victory noted above, I think I'm most proud of the fact that I've always managed to get results that have been valued and appreciated by my clients,

whether through trial, innovative and creative settlements, or through wins in key dispositive motions.

I think I have served my clients well by listening and helping them identify their desired outcome and the likely range of options available to them, while understanding not only their litigation concerns but their business interests as well.

Q: What aspects of law in your practice area are in need of reform, and why?

A: Asbestos litigation continues to be a drain on thousands of companies and the current system continues to exact high and variable transaction costs, while not providing any certainty or equitable compensation for those truly injured.

The enormous burden and cost of asbestos litigation calls for reform. Some form of legislative/administrative solution has long seemed to be the right approach but the politics have for just as long seemed to get in the way of such a solution.

If a suitable solution can be found for asbestos, it might also serve as a model for subsequent mass torts, though many new and emerging torts have been called the "next asbestos" only to disappear.

Q: Where do you see the next wave of cases in your practice area coming from?

A: I see a likely expansion of cases and claims in the industries most closely regulated now and likely to be even more closely regulated by the new administration, including pharmaceuticals and medical devices, chemicals and consumer products.

Though they have not seen wide-ranging success to date, I also believe we'll see continued efforts to expand and pursue claims for medical monitoring, nuisances and site-specific exposures to alleged toxic chemicals.

The increasing ability to detect such chemicals and substances in the environment and in people at ever-lower levels will likely lead to a corresponding increase in the claims for cleanup, remediation, personal injury and medical monitoring.

Q: Outside your own firm, name one lawyer who's impressed you and tell us why.

A: Phil Beck. He's impressive not only for his obvious trial skills but because he and his colleagues have found and created a niche that allows them a lot of freedom to do what

they want to do — try high profile cases.

Q: What advice would you give to a young lawyer interested in getting into your practice area?

A: I would say that a young lawyer can benefit from developing their ability to evaluate science and junk science with a critical eye, while at the same time learning to think like a plaintiffs' lawyer to see where the new wave of claims might be generated.

I also think young lawyers should begin thinking about how they would handle not just their own individual assignments, but also the larger tasks and strategy for managing mass tort claims.

Mass torts and toxic torts are some of the most interesting and complicated kinds of litigation and they often involve cutting-edge legal and scientific issues that can lead to a long and challenging career that can be as varied and interesting as any aspect of the law.