

Paul Durham

A Responsibility to Give Back to the Community

By Spencer Sutherland

When seeking a career path to follow, Paul Durham didn't have to look far to find inspiration.

"My dad was a lawyer," says Durham, who serves as director and general counsel for the law firm Durham Jones & Pinegar. "I admired his keen mind and the way his legal training allowed him to help people. I wanted to be able to help people, too."

Durham was in college when he made the decision to go to law school. When he shared the news with his father, he expected a pat on the shoulder or at least an "attaboy." Instead, his father simply replied, "OK. If that's what you want to do," Durham recalls with a laugh. "I've since realized that the law can be a demanding profession," he adds, "and that's what he was saying."

After practicing law for 11 years, Durham struck out on his own, founding Durham Jones & Pinegar in 1991. The firm has since grown to become one of the largest in Utah, employing more than 80 attorneys and about 80 staff in offices in Salt Lake, Ogden, St. George and Las Vegas.

The firm is highly decorated, earning accolades from U.S. News & World Report, Best Lawyers and Mountain States Super Lawyers. Durham has been recognized personally as a Top 100 lawyer in the Mountain States, and recently received the Professionalism Award from the Utah State Bar.

In his position as general counsel for the firm, Durham is responsible for helping his firm's lawyers be completely ethical in how they practice law. Though that entails such things as avoiding conflicts of interest between clients and protecting client confidentiality, it often just means enforcing the firm's long-standing "no jerk rule."

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Durham explains. "No jerk means that a person must treat others with courtesy and respect—both inside and outside the firm, whether dealing with a client, opposing counsel, a senior partner or the employee in the mail room."

Though he is certainly pleased with his firm's many professional accomplishments, Durham is most proud of the work it has allowed him to do outside of the office. He has served as board chairman at Pioneer Theatre Company and as chair of the S.J. Quinney College of Law Alumni Board. He has also taught classes at the J. Reuben Clark Law School at Brigham Young University and served as an ex-officio member of the Utah State Bar Commission when he was president of the Young Lawyers Section of the Bar.

"I feel that I've been greatly blessed as a lawyer, and that I have a responsibility to give back to the community," he says. "It's also something that brings a lot of satisfaction."

Juggling all of these responsibilities, however, hasn't always been easy. "[The legal profession] can be demanding and stressful, as you're taking on your shoulders the big problems that your clients can't solve themselves," Durham says.

His advice for young lawyers struggling to find the right work/life balance is simple. "You have to be your own gatekeeper," he says. "You have to set your limits and make your family a priority. You can't leave for them whatever is left over, because otherwise there will never be a lot left."

As he looks back on his career, Durham only mentions one regret: "My dad died at a relatively young age, just after I graduated law school. It would have been fun to compare notes and to hear what he thinks about what's going on in my law practice."

Durham doesn't mind that, at this point, none of his own children have followed in his legal footsteps. "I just hope that they think [about me] what I thought about my father—that he was a good person who was using his legal skills to help other people."



Photo by Brandon Flint