

Fish & Richardson Leader On Thriving During Pandemic

By Tracey Read

Law360 (March 5, 2024, 2:00 PM EST) -- Despite not having a technical background himself, John Adkisson led global intellectual property law firm Fish & Richardson PC to record success during his first four-year term as president and CEO.

On Monday, the firm announced that Adkisson had been reelected to serve a second four-year term.

"I'm grateful and humbled by the fact that Fish entrusted me to lead the firm for another four years," Adkisson said Monday.

In 2022, Fish & Richardson saw \$512 million in revenue under Adkisson's leadership — the highest in the firm's history. In addition, it handled more patent cases and appeals, and secured more patents, than any other national firm.

Last year, attorney and operational staff retention outpaced the industry average, according to the firm.

Adkisson started with Fish & Richardson as a principal in 2001. Before that, he spent over four years as an associate at Robins Kaplan Miller & Ciresi LLP, his LinkedIn profile states.

The University of Wisconsin Law School graduate spoke to Law360 Pulse about his past accomplishments and his plans for the future. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What are your plans for your second term?

In terms of looking forward to the next four years, there are a couple things that are very important to me. The first is that Fish stays at the top in all aspects of client service. We at Fish are fortunate to have a terrific mix of loyal clients, and I want to hear from our clients directly about what it is that is working and what it is that we can do even better. So I'm looking forward to getting out on the road and meeting clients and having those discussions.

The second thing that is important for me is to continue to cultivate the next generation of talent at Fish. We have a truly impressive group of incoming lawyers. Our investment in our own talent has been a hallmark of Fish for decades. And that means that we have a deep roster that very few firms can match. I'll just give you one example. Our litigation group last year tried 14 patent cases across the



John Adkisson

country. In those 14 trials, there were 51 different Fish lawyers that stood up and argued to a judge or argued to a jury or took a witness. I just think that's a really impressive number. A lot of our competitors have one or two trial teams, but we have a very deep roster of talent. And I think what I want to do as president is to continue to invest in that talent and sit back and watch them shine.

What do you think your biggest challenges will be in your next term?

Consolidation in the legal industry is always top of mind. We're very fortunate to have a strong brand. We file more patents and litigate more cases than any other firm in America. And that's a fantastic platform for our people. So for me, it's really continuing to be at the top of the game in IP in the face of consolidation of the legal industry. We're very proud to be the largest IP-only firm in the United States.

What are some of your proudest accomplishments from your first term? You started in February 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic began.

I'm very impressed about the way that our firm came through the pandemic. It showed the strength and resilience of our people. It was certainly helpful to me — new to the role — to have such a collaborative and caring group of colleagues. That's probably the thing I'm most proud of. I also think that the way we've come out of the pandemic with respect to our hybrid work model has been really good for retention. Our retention rates with Fish, both on the lawyer side and the staff side, outpaced the industry. And I think that's because people recognize that Fish is a fantastic place to build a career. So it's really coming through the pandemic and continuing to make Fish a great place for people to practice law.

You have a journalism degree from the University of Nebraska. What made you decide to attend law school?

It's a great degree to get. My friends from journalism school are still some of my best friends in the world. And some of them stuck it out. Some of them did things that are kind of adjacent to journalism like I'm doing. I will say, when I look at the New York Times or CNN and see people I used to work with, I'm like, "That's pretty darn cool." I miss that part of the job for sure.

I applied to law school as a little bit of a backup in my final year of undergrad. I had a job in hand in Phoenix, and so I literally, the August before I started law school, had to decide to stay or drive to law school. And it was a very tough decision that I made. I pointed the car back to the northeast and went to law school and haven't really regretted it.

Why did you focus on IP law in particular?

I was just drawn to the science of it all. Obviously I don't have a technical background myself, but I'm surrounded by some of the brightest people in the world. I used to work on cases with some of the coolest inventors and most knowledgeable experts, and it was a good marriage for me because you need people to explain hard concepts to a jury. You need people who can write well. Both of those suited my skill set, so that's why I thought it was a good fit.

What do you like the most about being president and CEO of a major law firm?

I like the team that we have here at Fish, and that goes from the lawyers through the staff. We have just

an incredibly cohesive group of people. I try to get to our offices and sit down and really talk with everybody in the firm at least once a year. And it's those conversations that I find the most rewarding and humbling. Hearing from people who have been here for 25 or 30 years, while at the same time talking to people who've been here for two weeks. I really enjoy that part of the job.

--Editing by Daniel King.

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