

# Coudert Brothers LLP

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## David Huebner – Chairman

David Huebner is the eighth chairman in the 150-year history of Coudert Brothers LLP. Elected to the post in April 2003, at 42 he was the youngest chairman in the Firm's history, as well as the first to lead Coudert from outside of its New York City headquarters.

An international arbitration specialist, Mr. Huebner has represented governments, pharmaceutical companies, computer software and hardware companies, motion picture studios, publications, and a variety of U.S. and overseas enterprises in disputes before the ICC, AAA, AFMA, and other arbitral bodies. He developed these practice interests while in school and believes that the international business economy is increasingly important for law students to learn during law school, especially if they go on to work at Coudert.

When not attending to his duties with Coudert, Mr. Huebner has engaged in a variety of public service, academic, and pro bono work. He has chaired the California Law Revision Commission, the Los Angeles Productivity Commission, and various local and national charitable organizations. He teaches international business transactions and international arbitration at the University of Southern California's Law School and is actively involved as an arbitrator in international moot arbitration competitions. He has served as pro bono counsel to a variety of civic and not-for-profit entities, including the Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department.

Born in a small coal mining town in Pennsylvania, Mr. Huebner was educated at Princeton University, where he graduated summa cum laude in public and international affairs, and earned his J.D. from Yale Law School. From 1984 to 1985, he served in Tokyo on a Henry Luce Fellowship as an aide to a member of the lower house of the Japanese Diet. He has been a member of the Advisory Panel of the Institute for Transnational Arbitration, the Arbitration and Mediation Institute of Canada, and the British Columbia International Commercial Arbitration Centre, and he is a founding member of the Los Angeles Committee on Foreign Relations.



## Q&A with David Huebner

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### **Do you think law schools provide adequate training for a legal career?**

Law school does prepare people in most respects. There may be insufficient training in a few discrete areas, such as ethics and the business of law, but schools are getting better and better at dealing with those issues. Most law schools, rightly so, approach legal education from an academic perspective, whereas the people who go to law school are interested in making a living at law afterwards. So there is a business component, dealing with issues like attracting and managing clients, that is not really covered.

One of the biggest challenges for new lawyers is to step out of a purely academic environment into a business environment where time is tracked in six-minute increments. It can be a very jarring transition for many new lawyers. Law schools might productively focus on that psychological transition, either in the form of seminars or internships, or some form of hands-on experience, so it is not as abrupt a transition. Also, law school students need to choose their summer environments carefully. Too many law students opt not to go work at a firm, or they have trouble finding a position because the market has been so tight lately. Such experience is very important if the student wants to practice in the private sector.

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## **What advice would you give to future lawyers worried about balancing work and outside commitments?**

Future and new lawyers should be careful about screening the environments they are interested in joining, and getting to know what those environments are like before making the decision about which one to join. Too often, people just shoot for prestige, or they take what they see and hear at face value without digging deeper.

What I focused on as a new lawyer were actions, not words. When I made the choices for myself, I spent less time asking questions and more time observing how people acted in those environments – especially mid-level associates, senior associates, and junior partners. What kind of life were they living? Did they enjoy their work? What kind of work were they doing? What experiences did they have? These strata, from the mid-level associates to the junior partners, seemed to reflect best what a firm was really like. Were junior partners running client matters and handling things themselves? Were senior associates active in public service and part-time teaching? I looked around, and I based my decisions on what I saw, rather than what anybody told me.

Certain surveys can also be useful because informed peer level experience is invaluable. We are proud that Coudert finished first among New York firms and second overall in *The American Lawyer's* Summer Associates Survey last year. We cannot manufacture those kinds of results. The summer associates are the ones who evaluate the quality of their actual experience.

## **What personality traits and attributes do you think make a good lawyer?**

There are two traits above all others – tenacity and curiosity. Lawyers should be all about problem solving, and in order to solve problems, you need to be curious enough to learn everything you can about a client's business, its overall goals, and its challenges and problems, and then tenacious enough to work through lots of potential solutions until you find the one that works.

Too often, people confuse tenacity with aggressiveness. If I were in the market for a lawyer, I would not look for an aggressive lawyer. Aggression does not have any connotation of intelligence or usefulness for me. When I hear aggression, I think of badgers or barbarians...not good lawyers.

## **What are the things that make practicing law so rewarding for you?**

Most rewarding is the problem solving. I have always enjoyed coming to a situation or a set of facts or circumstances, analyzing them, figuring out what the issues are, and then finding a way to advance the interests of the clients within that context. There is a sense of accomplishment at the end, especially when you start with a situation that appears hopeless but then find a novel way to make it better or make it right.

## **What has surprised you the most about the legal industry?**

What has surprised me the most is something I mentioned earlier: the number of unpleasant, unnecessarily aggressive lawyers. There is, of course, nothing wrong with being tenacious or vigorously advocating your client's interests – in fact, that is the foundation of the profession. I am continually surprised, however, at lawyers who mistake being unpleasant, unprofessional, loud, or even unethical with vigorously representing their clients. The legal profession is filled with people who are collegial and professional and know how to represent their clients without doing damage to the system or to other people. But there are more lawyers than I would like who have no qualms about doing damage to the system or undermining the credibility of the profession in order to advance their interests. Despite market pressures and cultural distortions, the law remains a profession, not a sport or video game.

### **What predictions do you have about the future of the legal industry?**

Unfortunately, I think there will continue to be an increase in what I call the “free agent syndrome,” where partners and associates jump from firm to firm fairly frequently based on what another firm offers them. That is a destructive trend. We should be about careers, not just paychecks, and careers are not built by jumping every two or three years as some people do these days. Unfortunately, I think the syndrome will increase as the market continues to be tight and firms try to grow aggressively through lateral hiring. The upshot will be greater instability within law firms, which will lead to consolidation-and the failure of more firms. It is very difficult to build long-term loyalty and stability, or to develop close relationships or service clients optimally, when you have a revolving-door mentality. Over time, however, there will eventually be a return to a more traditional, stable, loyal law firm environment, because that is what best serves clients’ needs.

### **If you weren’t practicing law, what would your dream job be?**

I am fascinated by string theory and quantum mechanics, but it is probably too late for me to retool as a theoretical physicist, which would be my dream job in many respects. One of the things I enjoy most about the practice of law is writing, so if I were not practicing law, I would want to write. I live in Los Angeles, so it would perhaps be too much of a cliché to do screen-writing. I would, though, love to sit on the beach with my laptop and write mysteries, perhaps involving the suspicious disappearance of partners shortly after delivering associates’ reviews.

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— *David Huebner*