

25 Years In, Litigation Boutique Bartlit Beck Has New Leadership

Jason Peltz, who has spent most of his career as a litigator with Bartlit Beck, has become the firm's new managing partner. Longtime firm leader and former managing partner Skip Herman has assumed the role of chairman.

By **Scott Flaherty**

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Litigation-focused law firm Bartlit Beck Herman Palenchar & Scott has made its first leadership transition since the firm's founding 25 years ago.

The firm has elevated Jason Peltz to managing partner, while former longtime managing partner Sidney "Skip" Herman remains at the firm in the role of chairman. The leadership changes quietly took effect at the beginning of the year.

In an interview with *The American Lawyer*, Herman said he has spent the past few years preparing for, and incrementally carrying out, a transition plan that he hopes will put the firm on a successful run into the future. He also said Peltz, an active litigator who has spent 22 years—almost his entire legal career—at Bartlit Beck, long served as a second-in-command and made for a natural fit as the firm's next managing partner.

"After 25 years, any organization, particularly when you're trying to institutionalize it ... needs new blood and new leadership," Herman said. "I'm stepping out of the day-to-day, and doing a little more of the long-range planning and financial planning."

As firm chairman, Herman said he will continue to oversee the firm's finances and lawyer compensation, at least in the short-run. He had held the managing partner role throughout the full history of Bartlit Beck, which began in 1993 when prominent litigator Fred Bartlit Jr. led a group of lawyers in breaking off from Kirkland & Ellis, adopting a business model that eschewed the traditional billable hour.



Bartlit's prominence helped establish the firm early on, but it wasn't long before it became known for multiple top-flight trial lawyers, including co-founder Philip Beck, who headed former President George W. Bush's trial team in *Bush v. Gore* in the Florida recount litigation that ultimately determined the 2000 presidential election.

In the years that followed, Bartlit Beck remained committed to the core principles that guided its early days, including a staffing approach that consists of small teams mostly made up of partners, an aversion to lateral hiring, and a billing model based on flat fees, according to the firm's leaders. Those attributes have set the firm apart, said Peltz, who added that as Bartlit Beck's new managing partner, he does not see them changing anytime soon.

"As I look around at our exceptional partners, with experienced teams, and I look at ... the top-notch

nature of the associates, I'm excited. I come to work, as almost all of our partners do, excited," Peltz said. "We're working on small teams, ... we're all digging in on it together and it's an exciting opportunity to do something that we know works, and that we look forward to doing."

Bartlit Beck has also placed a premium on developing talent from within, hiring a small number of highly credentialed associates each year, and giving younger lawyers meaningful trial experience, according to firm leaders. For example, when the firm announced its newly elected partners in January, it noted that the five of them—four of whom are women—collectively have more than 130 days of trial experience.

The firm's approach differs drastically from most large law firms, which tend to have many more associates than partners. Bartlit Beck, in contrast, has 63 litigation partners and just 12 associates.

"If you only hire two or three or four people a year with the expectation that they're going to be with you their whole careers, then you approach their training and mentoring much differently than if you have a bunch of people," said firm co-founder Beck. "We've actually institutionalized the ethic that giving opportunities and responsibility to younger lawyers is the highest achievement that you can attain at the firm."

Even with younger lawyers playing substantive roles, Bartlit Beck has managed to rack up big litigation wins and maintain long-term client relationships, including its representation of United Technologies Corp. and its jet engine unit, Pratt & Whitney, in several high-stakes cases over the years.

"Over the last, say, 20 years, they've always handled our biggest litigation matters," said Steven Greenspan, chief litigation counsel at United Technologies. He noted that the firm in 1996 successfully defended Pratt & Whitney in a four-month antitrust trial, securing a jury verdict that cleared the company of hundreds of millions of dollars in damages claims. More recently,

in 2011, Bartlit Beck helped United Technologies prevail in a patent dispute with Rolls-Royce, and Greenspan said he has again turned to the firm to help his company navigate pending environmental litigation in Florida.

Reflecting back over the firm's first 25 years, Beck said the sustained, positive track record of developing skilled trial lawyers, is something he might not have expected back in 1993.

"The firm's success has exceeded my expectations, and I had very high expectations," Beck said. "I thought we would do well in court, and we did, but what I didn't really anticipate is that we would have the success that we've had in developing the next generation of lawyers ... that are as well-credentialed as they are."

Beck also credited Herman's stewardship of the firm in the managing partner role as key, adding that he has nothing but confidence in Peltz to continue on a similar path.

"He has done a great job of managing the firm so that we've maintained our focus on quality while still doing it in a way that we've been profitable and economically successful," Beck said of Herman. "I think Jason's going to do an equally excellent job. I think it's going to be very, very seamless; he's committed to the same principles."

Peltz stressed that his goal as managing partner is to continue to hold true to the firm's principles, "doubling down" on Bartlit Beck's approach.

"That, in particular, is a focus on hiring and retaining the best people, training them and really putting forth experienced teams that provide us the greatest opportunity for success in winning for our clients," Peltz said. "We're anticipating this transition being not only smooth, but beyond smooth."

Scott Flaherty, based in New York, covers the business of law with a focus on plaintiffs lawyers and litigation involving law firms. He can be reached at sflaherty@alm.com. On Twitter: @sflaherty18