

# DAILY BUSINESS REVIEW

## Javier Lopez Takes Over as Youngest Managing Partner at Kozyak Tropin

by Catherine Wilson

You might say Javier Lopez is a little busy.

At 39, he took over last month as Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton’s youngest managing partner, he remains co-chair of the boutique’s complex and commercial litigation practice, and he has a 14-month-old son.

At this point, Lopez is wondering, “Can you make a day 30 hours instead of 24?”

He’s been at the firm for nine years, built his reputation as a top-drawer, high-energy litigator involved in multidistrict litigation and high-profile cases, and served as president of the Cuban American Bar Association. But being asked to take over as managing partner gave him pause.

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Two weeks passed.



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“I probably took a little bit longer than I should have thinking about it, and they kind of reminded me that they asked me,” he said.

Lopez knew the hours his predecessor, Corali Lopez-Castro, put in and was weighing the commitment.

“If I decide to do something, it’s going to be 100 percent and dedicate a lot of time to it to make

sure I do a good job,” he said. His 100 percent might look like 250 percent to others.

Lopez was a four-year letterman in baseball at Harvard — even after being blinded in his left eye three weeks after going to college and being hit in the face while helping a teammate in the batting cage. (He picked up the nickname “Cyclopez” but is better known today as Javy.) He co-founded

the Juntos Foundation Inc. to research cancer and heart disease after his father died of cancer.

Lopez clerked for Alberto Gonzales in the White House counsel's office before he left to become attorney general and participated in the vetting process for two U.S. Supreme Court nominees — one that went “really, really bad” with Harriet Miers, who withdrew, and the replacement, John Roberts. While in Washington, he also worked for U.S. Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart, a Miami Republican.

Lopez was with Steel, Hector & Davis in Miami and started looking around when it merged with Squire Patton Boggs' predecessor. He reached out to Lopez-Castro, whom he knew through CABA. She's “very, very by the book” and agreed only to share his resume with the partners. He landed an interview the next day and again the day after.

“The only thing we didn't talk about was the law,” he said. The Kozyak Tropin partners were looking for a culture fit, and that remains true today.

Founding partner Harley Tropin said Lopez was chosen “because he embodies the skills and values we most care about — character, legal ability and in Javy's case unique leadership. He cares about everyone in the firm, and that shows through.”

It also flows into the hiring process. After serving on the hiring

committee, Lopez said the firm has a baseline need for talented attorneys, but after that it's about “buying into the family.” Few attorneys or staffers leave short of retirement.

Eight attorneys have been hired in the past three years to take the Coral Gables firm to 29, and Lopez expects to reach “our sweet spot” at 30 in the next year. Joining the firm is more intense than when he was hired. A recent addition was in play for two years, came in for eight interviews and shared a meal with every partner before his first day.

The managing partner role at Kozyak Tropin is somewhat unusual for a small firm. MPs serve two years or so while maintaining their litigation practice, and the founders didn't hoard the title.

Lopez's time had come. But what about all the law firm management work that's now on his agenda?

He's not preoccupied with questions about family friendly policies after taking about five months off in his second year at the firm to care for his dying father, or about minority hiring at a firm that had an African American woman managing partner, Detra Shaw-Wilder, years ago, and has four former CABA presidents.

Attorney training and mentoring are integral to Lopez's workday.

Artificial intelligence has become a priority with the need for predictive coding when discovery tips well past 1 million documents in many cases.

Case selection is a constant task with about two class action ideas coming up each week. “We probably take less than 1% of what's proposed, but we like to have our skin in the game,” Lopez said.

Litigation financing is in place in a large health care MDL the firm is part of, but it's only something the firm is exploring for its own cases. “We've always self-funded. We're extremely selective.”

Collections, vendor contracts and human resources now take up more of Lopez's time, but he puts a priority on the personal relationships behind the issues.

Replacing the office coffee machine almost led to a rebellion. Six people who walked into his office on the same day wanted to make sure chai latte would still be an option. The new machine arrived last week.

“So at least this week I've been very, very popular,” Lopez said. “I've learned more about coffee and the difference between iced coffee and cold brew.”

In the end, he skips the caffeine, which can trigger a migraine due to his old eye injury.

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