

A former member of Big Law, Cincinnati attorney finds his niche in field of civil litigation

By Brian Cox



Attorney Seth Schwartz has largely led a deliberate, purposeful life, and it all started with Susanna, his wife of almost 22 years.

"I'm a very lucky man to have found the love of my life at a young age and was smart enough not to screw it up," says Schwartz, a partner in the litigation department at Manley Burke in Cincinnati.

The couple met at Tufts University in Boston where Schwartz was majoring in quantitative economics and European history, and Susanna was studying to be a veterinary surgeon.



Seth met his wife, Susanna, at Tufts University in Boston where he was majoring in quantitative economics and European history and she was studying to be a veterinary surgeon. The couple has been married almost 22 years.

Schwartz credits their relationship with spurring him to "get off the fence" and enroll in law school. After graduating from Tufts, Schwartz spent a year as a computer tech in Annapolis, Md., while Susanna started medical school at The Ohio State University.

"I was smart enough to figure out that I needed to be successful to stay with Susanna," says Schwartz. "I knew I had to have a profession of some kind. I wanted to give the relationship a chance. She is simply amazing."

While he had considered becoming a lawyer while at Tufts, where he led the pre-law society, Schwartz describes his decision to go to law school as "deliberately born out of love."

Schwartz's early years were lived out in "idyllic" Northampton, Mass., where his father was an OB/GYN, as had been his grandfather. But just as Schwartz was preparing to enter the eighth grade, the family moved to Reading, Pa., which proved to be a difficult transition. He found Reading to be a different world from the vibrant, liberal community he knew in Massachusetts. He went to public school for one "horrendous" year before attending The Hill School in Pottstown, Pa., an all-boys prep school where he met the man who would become like a second father to him, a mentor who would help shape how Schwartz now views the world.

Thomas Ruth, who was widely referred to by the moniker "Truth," was a history teacher who opened Schwartz's eyes to the importance of looking beneath the surface of an event or conflict and understanding its context.

"He was an extremely analytical person who viewed history through an analytical lens," recalls Schwartz, who still enjoys impersonating his former teacher's didactic speech pattern. "Students would gather in his apartment to drink tea and talk about current events and what was going on in the world."

Schwartz traces his approach to litigation back to lessons he learned from Ruth.

"Courtroom litigation is no more than teaching the story of both the law and the facts and how they combine together," he says. "I've always been somebody who is pretty good at distilling

A former member of Big Law, Cincinnati attorney finds his niche in field of civil litigation



The Schwartz family traveled together to Rome. Pictured are (l-r) Landon Schwartz, Susanna Schwartz, Hannah Schwartz, Leah Schwartz, Seth Schwartz, Eathan Vogelin, Tiffany Schwartz, Lael Schwartz, and Seth's dad, Peter Schwartz. Seth's mother, Lynne, took the photo. Also on the trip but not pictured were Drew Schwartz, Rachael Hershberger, and Greyson Schwartz.

the issues and history of a case and seeing where my client's case is strongest and how to minimize its weaknesses."

Despite valuing the influence of "Truth," Schwartz itched to leave Pennsylvania and return to Massachusetts at the earliest opportunity. Tufts University, a private research school with a strong academic reputation, offered that chance. Schwartz wanted his life to be different, he says, and he intentionally set about making that happen.

At Tufts, Schwartz blossomed into a social and well-liked presence on campus. He consciously chose to be as widely active as possible, doing his best to be well-rounded after four years of attending an all-boys boarding school. He joined the ski team, was president of his dorm, and headed up the Pre-Legal Society. In the process, he forged life-long friendships. And, of course, met Susanna.

"There were a lot of things to be interested in," he says.

Schwartz employed the same talent for intentionality when he decided to go to law school. Having scored in the 97th percentile on the LSAT, he was determined to go to Northwestern University Pritzker School of Law despite having average grades at Tufts. When he was wait-listed at Northwestern, he sought out every opportunity to secure a place, including taking a tour of the school that proved consequential.

On his first day visiting the campus, he sat in on a morning lecture where the professor was grilling students on the Socratic method. When the professor called upon Schwartz, who was sitting in a corner seat in the top tier and asked if he had read the case for the day, Schwartz responded, "If you would have assigned the case to me, I would have read it." After a few more witty exchanges with the professor, it became clear, first to the raucous entertainment of the class and later to the professor that Schwartz

was merely a visiting student and not a student in the class that did not do the reading. Afterward, several students invited him to come with them to their contracts class and then to lunch. Later in the day, Schwartz ended up playing flag football with them on the quad and then they all went to a bar, where Schwartz bought his new friends "beers of gratitude."

"Just tell them tomorrow I should be here, and I look forward to doing this again next year," Schwartz recalls saying.

His social skills paid dividends when on the Monday morning after he returned home, he got a call from the director of admissions at the law school. Apparently, more than a dozen students had come into his office on Friday morning to advocate for Schwartz's admission.

"This has never happened before. You're the second person off the wait list," said the director. "Congratulations."

Schwartz wasn't going to squander the opportunity. If he hadn't exactly pushed himself to excel academically at Tufts, he did at Northwestern.

"I worked my tail off," he says. "I treated it as a job and worked really hard. No matter what was going on, I hid myself away in the library and worked. You can do great things by just plugging away. It also didn't hurt that the NBA was on strike my first year of law school."

He graduated in the top 10 percent. His parents were so impressed by how well he'd done that they offered to pay half of the tuition.

Schwartz returned to Boston and started his career as an associate at Bingham Dana, which became Bingham McCutchen, one of the top law firms in the country. As he had in law school, Schwartz threw himself into the work. For four years, he sharpened his teeth on civil litigation in Big Law, before stepping away to take a position with a smaller firm as he and Susanna contemplated marriage.



Seth was on the ski team at Tufts University and now enjoys skiing with his wife and daughters. The family has a condo in Park City, Utah, where they travel to ski as often as possible.

A former member of Big Law, Cincinnati attorney finds his niche in field of civil litigation



Seth and his wife, Susanne, have two daughters, Leah and Hannah. The family enjoys traveling whenever they get the chance.

Susanna, who had just finished a three-year residency in small animal surgery, was able to get a job anywhere but in Boston, which already had a large concentration of veterinary surgeons. The couple considered moving to North Carolina or perhaps somewhere out west. Schwartz, unsurprisingly, had no interest in returning to Pennsylvania.

But the deciding factor proved to be that Susanna's parents were in Cincinnati and would be willing to provide childcare help when the time came. Family was everything even before Schwartz had a family.

So, in 2006, they moved to Cincinnati where Schwartz joined Dinsmore & Shohl, a national firm of more than 750 attorneys. Over the next 17 years, Schwartz rose from an associate to an income partner to an equity partner. He established a reputation for having a no-nonsense direct approach that was appreciated by his clients and yielded results.

"I'm always honest," says Schwartz. "To me, honesty is not just saying the things you don't want to say. It's also saying things plainly and clearly. People gild the lily when they speak. To me, in my mind, that's some form of dishonesty. I try to say it like it is."

When he made partner at Dinsmore, he turned his purposeful attention to rainmaking, spending three nights a week at every event or ceremony he could. His goal each of those nights was to have three meaningful conversations with people about their lives, careers, and issues. He calls it "the rule of three."

His practice focuses on civil litigation, including commercial, close-corporation, real estate, and breach of contract disputes. As a litigator for more than 20 years, he has extensive experience defending his clients in federal and state courts in Ohio and throughout the U.S, including in federal and state courts in Massachusetts, New York Federal Bankruptcy Courts, the Federal Southern District Court situated in New York, and Illinois State Court in Chicago.

"In litigation, if you're good at what you do, your clients need you," he says. "They need you to present their case well, they need you to empathize with them, and they need you to be a good negotiator."

He considers negotiations to be a strength and teaches the subject to undergraduates at the University of Cincinnati.

When COVID-19 hit in 2020, Schwartz began working from home, and discovered he enjoyed it. He liked cooking for the family every night and helping his daughters with their homework. He had a bit of an epiphany.

"I realized that I didn't want to be at the office all the time," he says. "I was there so many nights that I was friends with the cleaning staff."

He took the opportunity to step back and consider his priorities. Around the same time, a mentor and former colleague at Dinsmore – now a partner at Manley Burke – contacted him. Sean Callan, who Schwartz describes as the best real estate transactional lawyer he's ever met, told Schwartz the firm was looking for an experienced litigator.

The timing seemed ideal. Schwartz wanted to be with a firm that had a more relaxed culture but still practiced extremely high-quality law and Manley Burke fit the bill. He joined the firm in March 2023.

"I love the people, and I love the environment," says Schwartz. "We do stuff together around the office. It's not the environment of a large law firm. It's a firm of very talented attorneys who are not interested in the Big Law style."

Founded in 1979 by Bob Manley and Tim Burke, the law firm's Fraternal Law Partners division oversees the National Anti-Hazing Hotline and publishes the Fraternal Law Newsletter that deals with law related to North American fraternities and sororities.

Schwartz's litigation practice has doubled in size since he started.

"Our litigation has blossomed," he says. "There are great people in our litigation department. They're every bit as good and a lot happier than large law firm people; we all like working together and we've done great things."

He enjoys teaching and mentoring younger lawyers, drawing again on lessons he learned from his old history teacher in boarding school.

"I want to help somebody solve a problem," he says. "I have no interest in making them feel bad. I want to teach a perspective and a thought process. I want to help them learn to look at conflict and not be scared of it, but to look for the opportunity in it. The Chinese word for conflict is both danger and opportunity, and I think that's right."

He wants his mentees to understand the reasoning behind actions, not just the steps and rules.

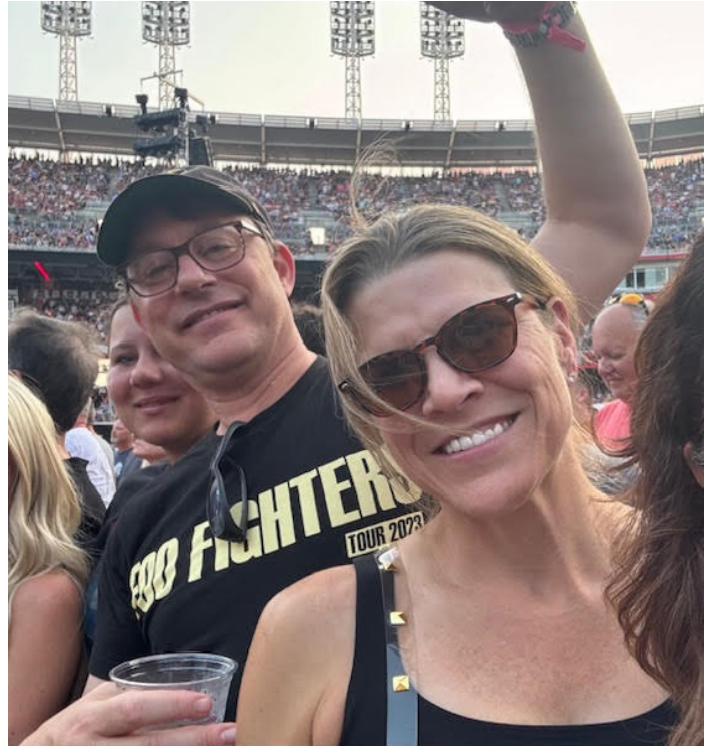
A former member of Big Law, Cincinnati attorney finds his niche in field of civil litigation

“When I talk about truth and the history behind it, I do that in law,” he says. “I want them to know what the rule is – that’s important – but what the reasoning is and why the rule was created instructs you further and actually helps you figure things out, rather than just trying to memorize a bunch of useless rules.”

In addition to his practice, Schwartz is an avid real estate developer, who discovered a passion for it when he rehabbed a deck on his first house in Boston. He is currently partners with a builder on several projects. He is also starting a legally related software company to address an unfilled market need. For many years he has served on the executive boards of the Cincinnati American Jewish Committee, Jewish Community Relations Counsel, and Jewish Family Services. He also enjoys playing basketball twice a week, is an avid downhill skier, and is a big fan of the Boston Celtics and the Foo Fighters. He and Susanna have two daughters: Leah, 16, and Hannah, 14. Schwartz says the “three ladies” are the most important of his many interests.

In looking at the arc of his life and career to date, Schwartz says he couldn’t be more grateful and thankful.

“I’m focused on living the best life I can,” he says. “You get one go around. I want to look back and have people say it was great having me around and that I brought other people up with me. That I was a great teammate. I want everybody here to grow together and to help build this law firm into everything it can be.”



Seth and Susanne are big fans of the Foo Fighters and had the opportunity to see them in concert in 2023.