

Attorney took a leap of faith in building firm from scratch

By Brian Cox



Tom Winner moved to Las Vegas as a young, eager attorney fresh out of law school with the intent of staying only long enough to gain a few years of experience.

He never got around to leaving.

"Thirty-two years later, I'm still here," he says with a wry smile.

Winner, a founding partner of Winner & Booze, grew up in Scottsbluff, Neb., the son of a small-town lawyer and an English immigrant who devoted herself to raising six children and volunteering in their Catholic parish and local community. His parents, Frank and Daphne, met while Frank was in the service overseas. A graduate of Creighton Law School, Frank Winner not only practiced law but also served in the Nebraska National Guard, modeling discipline, service, and professionalism for his children – three of whom became lawyers themselves. He set for them an example of honesty, kindness, and courage.



Tom's older brother Bob (right) encouraged him to move from Nebraska to Las Vegas to practice law. Bob is now Of Counsel at Winner & Booze.

"In his quiet way, he made differences in many peoples' lives," says Winner of his father, who he describes as a voracious reader who enjoyed writing and thinking. "I thought my dad was the smartest guy I'd ever met. I saw, that through his gifts, he could be of service to others and the community, and I thought, geez, maybe I can do what he does."

Though Frank Winner retired from practice just as his young son was beginning law school at the University of Nebraska, he taught several lessons that Winner has carried on into his own practice.

"He told me that a lawyer's reputation means everything," says Winner. "A lawyer should always practice with integrity and treat others with old-fashioned courtesy. A reputation for honest dealing is essential for any lawyer practicing in a small town. He also told me that a lawyer who gets a reputation for settling all his cases will suffer for it, and his clients will suffer for it, too."

Winner's small-town Midwestern roots engrained in him the values of courtesy and hard work. He nonetheless always felt the tug of a larger stage and knew he had big-city ambitions.

At first, he thought journalism might be his calling. His older brother and sister had gone into law, but he was drawn to literature, writing, and argument. He later switched his major at the University of Nebraska from journalism to English and considered graduate school until a scholarship to law school shifted his plans.

"I liked the idea of helping other people and trying to use my brains and my voice to stick up for people who can't stick up for themselves," he says. "I respect and appreciate the intellectual rigor of the law. I enjoy solving problems, and I am grateful for the chance to help others navigate the legal system."

After earning his law degree, Winner left Nebraska for Las Vegas at the encouragement of his brother, Bob, who'd moved there only a couple months before. The two brothers took the bar exam together and set about building their law careers. Winner landed at Edwards, Hale & Hansen, a medium-size firm that was primarily liability defense. He encountered talented lawyers and committed mentors at the firm who allowed him to handle his own caseload. He embraced the opportunity with zeal.

"They tried a lot of cases, and I appreciated the confidence they had in me," says Winner, who tried his first case as a young lawyer

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At the top of Tom's list of activities he enjoys outside of the law office is spending time with his children, Charlie (left) and Max (right).

some 29 years ago. "The lawyers I learned from were first and foremost gentlemen. They treated everybody respectfully. They took their oaths as lawyers seriously. They were very good, decent, honest people."

A decade after moving to Vegas, Winner felt he had enough litigation experience under his belt to take a leap of faith with three colleagues to launch their own firm, which eventually became Winner & Booze.

It was a big step that came with some risk.

"It was a scary proposition at first," he recalls, "but after some time passed, I wondered why I'd ever been nervous about it to begin with."

Winner and his new partners decided on the name of the firm with a coin flip. They had to move into their new offices a few days early and so their first meeting took place in an empty conference room with the attorneys and paralegals sitting on the floor with pens and a single legal pad.

What Winner and his new partners lacked in furnishings, they made up for in energy and resolve. From its beginning, the firm encouraged a relaxed culture. Winner says a day never felt like he was going to work but rather spending time with friends.

There was a bit of a learning curve, of course. One thing that was immediately evident to him was that there was no smart senior partner down the hall; he was now "the guy." As a litigator who was accustomed to controlling as much as possible on a case, Winner says one of the greatest challenges of building a new firm was learning how to let go of some of that control and depend on other people.

"Most lawyers I know would rather be practicing law than managing other people," he says, "but running a firm has been rewarding in that I've gotten to meet and work with some great people."

Winner says he and the other partners were all rowing in the same direction.

"We all cared about doing good work, and we cared about taking good care of our clients," he says. "We cared that our clients saw us as willing to stick our chins out and fight."

The firm, which began as a handful of lawyers, has grown steadily to about a dozen attorneys. From defending personal injury cases to untangling complex insurance disputes, the firm steadily built a reputation across Nevada courtrooms.

Winner & Booze maintains a single office, a few minutes from the courthouse, and competes for business with much larger, multi-state law firms. Winner believes his clients appreciate that they are a local firm, a little bit old-fashioned, whose entire partnership practices law in Las Vegas.

"Our clients don't have to deal with lawyers in other time zones – who have never tried a case here – making decisions about their cases," he says. "Neither do our clients have to deal with a firm whose lawyers attempt to collaborate via email or phone calls."

His brother is now of counsel, adding to the firm's sense of family. Several of the attorneys have Midwestern roots like Winner.

"There's definitely a Midwestern work ethic here," he says. "I think we offer a better level of service because we're local."



Attorney Thomas Winner has been representing businesses and people in Nevada courtrooms since 1993. Since he co-founded his own firm in 2004, he has overseen the firm's evolution from its first staff meeting on the floor of a borrowed office, to one of the most respected firms of its kind in the region.

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The firm values collaboration and fosters an environment where everyone pitches in. Winner says his best work is always the product of a coordinated group effort. A firm culture that emphasizes the sharing of knowledge, time, insights, and resources among several lawyers offers clients better service.

“You never feel like you’re on your own handling a case,” says Winner. “You’ve got a lot of people working with you, helping you.”

As a small to medium-sized firm, Winner & Booze offers all the advantages of a small firm, but with the resources and capabilities of a much larger firm, according to Winner.

“We have a small firm’s flexibility, a small firm’s capacity for immediate collaboration,” he says. “Yet we also have the capacity of a larger firm and can devote teams of lawyers and staff to larger cases.”

What began as a temporary stop has become Winner’s home in a city that has given him not just a career but a community. Outside the office, he enjoys attending sporting events and traveling with his two children, Max and Charlie. He’s passionate about live music – especially jazz – as well as Las Vegas dining, traveling, Nebraska football, and the Golden Knights, an NHL squad that won the Stanley Cup title in 2023. Hockey wasn’t on his radar until the team came to town, but it quickly became a shared passion.

Looking back, Winner sees continuity from his Nebraska roots to his Las Vegas practice. Honesty, collegiality, and service – qualities he absorbed from his father and from the lawyers who mentored him – remain his guiding principles today.

And he has come to value not only the work but also the place that has held him far longer than he ever expected.

“I love the fact that I live in a city where everybody who lives here seems to come from somewhere else,” he says.



Tom Winner spends time with Charlie at a San Diego State University football game (above) and Max on the beach (below).

