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**“You have to work hard in this business, but remember: at your funeral, nobody’s going to stand up and thank you for that extra day you spent in the office.”**

Managing partner **John Young**  
on BOYNECLARKE LLP’s ethos

Interview by Lisa Ryan

**A**s the managing partner of BOYNECLARKE, John Young has helped his law firm grow from its humble start in 1972 to one of the largest firms in Halifax, Nova Scotia. As the firm is gearing up to celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Young took some time to talk shop with *Advantage*.

**Advantage: Can you tell us a bit about the history of BOYNECLARKE?**

John Young: The firm was started in 1972 by three lawyers fresh out of law school, and we’ve since grown to about 50 lawyers. From the beginning, each of us has carried on a specialized or limited practice. As we’ve grown, we’ve added various skills.

**When did you get involved?**

After I graduated from law school at Dalhousie University, I spent four years working as a political aid in Ottawa. I was made aware that there were three fellows starting a law firm in Halifax, and I kept that in mind. After I finished my stint in Ottawa, I went to the University of London and received a master’s in law. When I returned to Halifax, I looked these guys up. I had the choice to start with a larger firm, but instead I decided to work with BOYNECLARKE. I became the firm’s fourth lawyer in the mid-1970s.



Photo: Marvin Moore

▶ THE EXPERTS

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Talking  
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## THE EXPERTS

The BOYNECLARKE 2011 Dragon Boat team, Law & Oarder, were the top corporate fund-raisers for the fifth year in a row at the Manulife Dragon Boat Festival.



### ***What are the advantages to working with a smaller firm?***

Well, because we focus on specialization, we've been able to develop skill sets that allow us to compete with larger firms. We've also taken on some larger, noteworthy cases. For instance, in the 1980s, one of our cases was in the Supreme Court of Canada, which we ended up winning. The film *Last Tango in Paris* was banned in Nova Scotia by the board of censors, and one of our lawyers represented a citizen who challenged the banning. It was a very large case to have as a small firm in the 1980s.

### ***Sounds like it! And what else sets your firm apart from the big guys?***

We're the upstart in some respect—the only firm that has started up in the recent period, while the majority of Halifax firms have been around for a while. We pride ourselves

on staying in touch with our clients and maintaining an extensive involvement in the community. In fact, we require that all of our lawyers volunteer within the community.

### ***Why?***

It gets you out of the office, which means you can actually have balance in your life. It also allows you to make a contribution to the community. And, of course, it also lets you maintain a connection to the community and develop more business.

### ***We've heard that your firm is also very involved with helping foster the career of emerging lawyers.***

That's true. While we were developing our business, we also focused on the law students we were bringing in. We have a summer student program, where we hire second-year law students to work for the charity of their choosing. We also send our students to small-claims court early on to give them early exposure to practicing law.

### ***What would you say is the firm's niche?***

We have a couple of odd niches, in addition to all the usual things law firms do. We still maintain a family law practice—many of the larger law firms have vacated that area. We also have a military practice, which is unique and useful in a military town like Halifax, and we spend a lot of time working with small businesses. They require a multitude of services but often don't have the financial

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## John Young's Career Milestones

- 1970**  
After being admitted to the Nova Scotia Bar, Young becomes the executive assistant to the Honourable Allen MacEachen
- 1975**  
Joins the three lawyers who started BOYNECLARKE LLP, choosing the small firm over a large firm
- 1976**  
Becomes a member of the board of directors for the CBC
- 1981**  
David Bright, Richey Clarke, and Jim Connors join BOYNECLARKE LLP, expanding the areas of practice
- 1993**  
Represents China Minmetals in the proposed acquisition of the Sydney Steel Corporation
- 1998**  
Is retained by Sempra Energy of California as representation in what became a successful attempt to obtain the natural-gas-distribution franchise for Nova Scotia
- 2005**  
Becomes managing partner and says he "begins herding cats," and that "there is no life like it"

resources, so we tailor some of our services. Many of the small clients we started out with are now bigger corporations.

### **What area do you specialize in?**

I do a lot of institutional law, representing a number of hospital and charitable organizations.

### **What advice would you give the younger you, just starting law school?**

I'd give myself two pieces of advice: First, if I wanted a pension, I'd join the public service. Other than that, I'd tell myself to try to keep some balance and perspective in my life. You have to work hard in this business, but at the same time you don't want to burn out after 10 years. Remember—at your funeral, nobody's going to stand up and thank you for that extra day you spent in the office. **\_a**



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