

| EXECUTIVE PROFILE |

Ed Tarlow

Families first

Longtime Boston lawyer eased off firm management to mobilize local family-business organization

BY SHERI QUALTERS
JOURNAL STAFF

Instead of preparing him for his ultimate career, the cooperative education program at Northeastern University taught Ed Tarlow an even more valuable lesson by helping him realize what he really wanted — and, more importantly, what he didn't want — from a career.

As a chemical engineering major, Tarlow had experimented with a series of jobs at corporate laboratories during his Northeastern days. But those positions increasingly underscored his growing desire for a more people-centric profession, not to mention his drive to play a starring role in his own business career.

"It didn't seem to be the right suit of clothes for me, so I looked around for occupations that would give me contact with people, mobility and more freedom of choice of what I did during the day," Tarlow said.

Tarlow's drive to run his own show prompted him to help start two law firms, then to shepherd the growth of the local chapter of the family-business networking and educational group, the Family Firm Institute Inc. Tarlow is a founding member of the organization's New England Chapter and he's been president of the chapter for the past three years.

After graduating from Boston College Law School, Tarlow co-founded a law firm with several other lawyers in 1965. "I didn't feel I was suited to work in a larger



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Ed Tarlow stands in a greenhouse of Cavicchio Greenhouses in Sudbury, one of the family-run businesses to which Tarlow specializes in providing legal services.

TARLOW: Shifting energy toward family-firm group from law practice

organization,” Tarlow said. “I had a sense of independence. Today, people call it an ‘entrepreneurial’ attitude. I wanted to develop, construct and mold something that was more suitable for me in my desire to practice law.”

When that law firm faltered; several of its attorneys banded together to form **Tarlow Breed Hart & Rodgers PC** in 1991, which is now a 22-lawyer firm that specializes in offering corporate, real estate, and trusts and estate services mostly to small and midsize companies in traditional industries such as manufacturing.

With so many larger firms focusing on startup technology, companies, Tarlow Breed has built a formidable base of family-owned, traditional businesses, Tarlow said. Tarlow Breed’s hourly billing rates of \$200 to \$385 land far below the hourly rates charged by the city’s top firms, which can reach \$600 per hour.

Still, when it comes to landing choice clients, Tarlow Breed does have to push a little harder, Tarlow conceded.

“The good institutional business has roots in many of the larger law firm organizations,” Tarlow said. “Having a firm that’s able to compete for that business has been a challenge, and I think, we’ve been doing so successfully.”

Tarlow specializes in tax law, business law and estate planning, and in 2003, the Boston Estate Planning Council named him Estate Planner of the Year. Although he has no plans to retire anytime soon, the 66-year-old has been handing off many management duties to the firm’s next generation.

Family focus

Yet as his firm duties have lightened, Tarlow has become the nucleus of a new

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Founding member, Tarlow Breed Hart & Rodgers PC

world — the Family Firm Institute’s New England chapter.

Over the past few years, Tarlow has been a driving force in rejuvenating the chapter and boosting its membership from between 50 and 75 family-owned firms to about 150 today, said the institute’s director Judy Green.

“He’s a no-nonsense person,” Green said. “He’ll delegate if he can, but if it looks as if that’s not going to work, he’ll pick up the ball and run with it.” Several years ago, Tarlow realized that the chapter was stagnating, so he “started making choices” about programming.

“I decided to become stronger in its direction as people sort of went by the wayside, in terms of directors and other officers,” Tarlow said.

Tarlow started by signing Mellon Financial Corp. to sponsor the group’s quarterly meetings, and he’s since added networking meetings, where members can officially talk up their own companies, and a multiprofession study group, which tackles problems faced by family-owned businesses.

In a recent coup, Tarlow got Edward C. “Ned” Johnson III to address the chapter about the Johnson family business — Boston-based mutual fund giant Fidelity Investments.

“Tarlow worked through institute

FROM THE FILE

Position: founding member, Tarlow Breed Hart & Rodgers PC; founding board, member and president of the Family Firm Institute Inc.’s New England chapter

Education: Bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering, Northeastern University, 1961; juris doctor, Boston College, 1964; master of laws in taxation, Boston University School of Law, 1968

Age: 66

Quote: ‘I didn’t feel I was suited to work in a larger organization. I had a sense of independence. Today, people call it an ‘entrepreneurial’ attitude.’

members. who worked at Fidelity,” Green said. “He was instrumental in getting that to happen.”

That skill at building networks and rapport has helped him strengthen the chapter as a resource for family-owned firms, said Jane Hilburt-Davis, president of Lexington-based family business consulting firm Key Resources.

“In one of the last study groups, he brought in a real live case for us to work on,” Hilburt-Davis said. “He had such a good relationship with the person, that he was able to trust Ed.”

Tarlow hopes that building the institute into an educational organization will make it a must join group for family-owned firms.

Tarlow said he wants such companies to feel that “This is an organization I need to belong to. They have access to info that people who are not members don’t have.”

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