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Profile: David Miller

Rogers Communications' general counsel learned from one of the very best.

Very few people are lucky enough to find a mentor with creativity and intelligence to help guide their career. David Miller, senior vice-president, general counsel and secretary of Rogers Communications Inc. has worked with a number of Canada's great business leaders. For that he is very grateful.

Miller, who holds a Bachelor of Commerce and both Civil and Common Law Degrees from McGill University, practiced at a law firm for several years before choosing to become a corporate counsel. In 1980, he joined the Toronto office of Lavalin Inc., one of the world's largest international engineering and construction companies, reporting to its president and chief executive officer, Bernard Lamarre.

"It was a fascinating opportunity and learning experience," recalls Miller. For the next seven years, Miller, who went on to become general counsel of Lavalin, and who has always had a zest for travel, adventure and challenge, often took to the road. He negotiated deals all over the world, spending a lot of time in Russia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Nigeria, Belgium, France, Austria, and all over the U.S. including Alaska.

On one occasion Miller went to Nigeria for a month, came back to Toronto, and two weeks later went to Germany to negotiate a large gas processing contract with the Soviet government. The international law practice was fascinating, and also, allowed him to interact and learn from senior-ranking government and business professionals.

As much as Miller enjoyed the intellectual challenges and corporate culture of Lavalin, the travel became wearying. Seeking a position that would allow him to spend time in his home base of Toronto, Miller explored opportunities, and consequently, in 1987 signed on as the first ever general counsel at Rogers Communications Inc.

It was there that Miller met the late Ted Rogers, who was to be Miller's mentor. "How many people get to work very closely for over 20 years with one of Canada's greatest business leaders?" he asks.

For many years the law department at Rogers remained small, just a handful of lawyers. Today, the 17-lawyer department is still relatively small, considering the company's extensive and differing business activities, says Miller.

Although many of the activities are complementary, the sheer scope and variety of businesses, which include wireless communications, cable television, internet, telephony, radio and television, magazines, specialty programming services, televised home shopping, a sports franchise (the Toronto Blue Jays baseball team), and ownership of the

Rogers Centre in Toronto (formerly the SkyDome), constantly present a “whole host of new and novel legal issues.”

“In my time at Rogers, I’ve gone from a one-person department to a much larger department handling a huge diversity in the type of legal issues, including M & A work, securities, financings, labour law, commercial transactions, tax, IP and real estate,” says Miller. “This is a very entrepreneurial company. It’s important that my department stay abreast of so many issues, always be ahead of the curve.”

Married with two young daughters, Miller’s spare time revolves around his family. Evenings are spent helping his children with their homework, planning family excursions and often, include a 45-minute walk with the family dog.

An avid reader, who describes himself as “fussy about writing style,” Miller’s taste is eclectic, but often tends toward classic books: recently he reread *Around the World in Eighty Days* by Jules Verne.

As a reader and lawyer, he has delved through almost all the novels by R. Austin Freeman (published from 1907 till the mid-1940s), featuring the medico-legal forensic investigator Dr. Thorndyke. Freeman invented the inverted detective story, familiar today to watchers of the *Law and Order* television series.

For Miller, who Ted Rogers called “a businessman’s lawyer,” the future feels full of the promise of intriguing, challenging, fascinating files. “Rogers is a very special place, full of bright, solution-oriented individuals. The more sophisticated the people around you are in terms of legal and business issues, the more you learn.

“As an in-house counsel you live the company’s problems and the opportunities,” says Miller. “You are paid first and foremost for your legal advice and knowledge of the law. But at the same time, you want to come up with creative solutions that don’t expose the company to greater risk, and further, helps the company accomplish its goals.”