

## Member Spotlight: Eric Schmadeke

# From courtroom dramas to corporate corruption, Eric Schmadeke's legal career has seen it all



Eric Schmadeke, a highly accomplished and recognized trial attorney and investigator, is Partner at Densborn Blachly LLP. His practice focuses on civil litigation, employment litigation, white collar criminal defence, civil rights, injury claims, and probate litigation. Eric's practice also includes the representation of clients in government and internal investigations. Eric conducts corporate investigations and advises boards of directors, audit committees, and special committees on sensitive matters involving possible misconduct by corporate or organization personnel.

Prior to joining Densborn Blachly LLP, Eric served for nearly seven years as a deputy prosecutor at the Marion County Prosecutor's Office, holding various positions in both the Major Felony and Grand Jury Sections, and most recently served as the chief of the Major Felony Special Victim's Unit. Among others, he investigated, prosecuted, and supervised some of the most high-profile and sensitive cases in the State, including those involving complex fraud; public corruption; tax; obstruction of justice; human trafficking; civil rights; physical and sexual abuse of children; robbery; theft; and murder.

When Eric Schmadeke first joined Indianapolis law firm Densborn Blachly in 2013 as a litigator, it was a career sea change for him.

Overnight, he switched roles as a tough state criminal prosecutor to private corporate lawyer; from a prosecutor who was addicted to the cut and thrust of court room drama, to suddenly helping clients find solutions – although eager to go to court for them if necessary.

"It was not my intended direction to go right into criminal law – it actually happened by mistake," Eric laughs. "I don't think I knew when I was at law school what kind of lawyer I was going to become. But I did know that whatever kind of lawyer, it needed to have something to do with the courtroom. That was always on the cards."

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To that end after his first year as a student, Eric joined a summer abroad programme that included practical legal experience in Greece and London. It was invaluable. It was also a lot of fun.

"The programme involved working my way down the Peloponnesian Peninsula and into the Greek islands, basically having a class in whatever hotel ballroom I was staying at that day," he recalls. "Really not bad. Olympia, Delphi, all those famous places that are just so beautiful. And, of course, the islands. At 25 years old, Mykonos is about as good a place as you can ever be visiting."

## FOCUS ON CRIMINAL LAW

In London, Eric was a student at University College where for the first time he focused on International criminal law. "I went to the Old Bailey to watch trials, learning the different roles of the QCs, barristers and solicitors. That kind of dynamic was interesting to learn about."

Back in Indianapolis, through family connections, Eric started work for the state prosecutor's office: "It took me about 15 minutes to realise how much I liked criminal law at the prosecutor's office. I was good at it right away. I understood it. I knew how to pound the pavement. I'm pretty street savvy for a lawyer and I can find my way around things; I'm good at problem solving. Those are useful qualities in criminal law."

It was a baptism of fire – soon he was trying major felony cases in court room trials even before graduating from law school. Eric found court and trials exciting and with the enthusiasm of youth he jumped into the experience without any trepidation: "I was working with fantastic attorneys; brilliant, experienced, hardnosed, shockingly good prosecutors. By the time I was graduating, a year later, I was doing closing arguments in major felony

cases. And it was thrilling for a young man and was very similar to the legal dramas you see on TV. The cut and thrust and all the rest of it. It was really there. I loved it."

## STARTING OUT AT DENSBORN BLACHLY LLP

After a few years of climbing the "career totem pole", Eric didn't feel there was a great deal more to accomplish – particularly as there was a hiring freeze at the federal prosecutor level, which was the obvious next step for him. At that point Eric decided to move on and with luck and serendipity he switched from public prosecutor to corporate lawyer almost overnight, joining Densborn Blachly as the corporate litigation attack dog focused on corporate corruption and fraud. He admits private law was very different and there was a lot of learning to do.

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Most criminal lawyers transition into personal injury law, criminal defense or family law, county courthouse practices. But Eric felt he had to move out of his comfort zone and start afresh. Suddenly, he was working as a partner with big firm lawyers who'd all previously worked for large multistate law firms: "These were lawyers with backgrounds in mergers and acquisitions, real estate etc; corporate lawyers who spent their days avoiding court, ironically. Unlike my experience where I was in court all the time, their job was to avoid court for their clients. If you're doing a great job as a transactional attorney, your client never sees court.

"But from a business perspective, you don't want clients to leave the firm if you don't have a litigator. And so I was connected to these guys in various ways – and I like going to court. My job is to represent our clients in litigation or dispute resolution. I make sure our clients are taken care of if they ever have to go to court.

"I solve litigations or dispute problems around issues such as protecting trade secrets, contact breaches or in the event of an employee misappropriating funds out of the company. There's just a wide remit. I sue and I represent people who've been sued."

## CROSSING LEGAL BOUNDARIES

Eric's philosophy is that the more times you do something, the better you get at it and the work has to be multidimensional. As a partner at Densborn Blachly, client issues are always multifaceted – having a wide breadth of experience in different types of litigation has given him the scope to cross boundaries for his clients rather than stay in one particular legal area.

"For me that's the best kind of work to do," Eric says. "It also ties in with IR Global's worldwide network. It gives us an international dimension that most law firms in the US – particularly in the middle of the country – simply don't have."

He admits that with IR Global, his own work and that of Densborn Blachly has expanded significantly. The firm is proactive at finding outside counsel to assist on cases that don't fit the Densborn Blachly remit or experience. With IR Global, the partners find the best fit internationally to help on cases to serve the client's needs.

"IR Global has expanded our whole approach to law from a county approach within 50 miles of Indianapolis to the world. Partners such as Don Densborn have mastered the network of IR Global and now has subject matter expertise all over the world.

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"We had a client recently who had an Atlantic customs problem, encompassing Europe to New

York. We were able to connect them with top counsel on both sides of the ocean, which solved their issue with incredible efficiency. Our client was thrilled with us. They couldn't have been happier, and even though we weren't the lawyers working for them directly, they were just so happy that we were able to connect those dots for them from the middle of the United States.

"They just didn't think that was possible for a firm of our size and our location be able to do that. IR Global made that happen."

## JUST LIKE A FAMILY

Going forward Eric continues to build business for the firm and for himself – and believes it's an ideal firm for a long career in private law: "We pass work back and forth. We're not siloed. It works like any business. I work with great people and I really care about them. We're a family."

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Eric admits he's an Indiana homeboy but when he's not spending all his time in the office his favourite pastimes are taking his wife and children to see the world.

Closer to home, when he has time off he also takes the family snow skiing in the Rockies or Northern Michigan: "I don't get to do it nearly as often as I like, obviously because of distance. But it's a real buzz. And we live on a lake, so I take my kids wake surfing at weekends.

"Just to take the kids out and do that; just to be out on the lake, on the water; it's a special time for us. It's our happy place and feels like a million miles away from the office."



## Eric Schmadeke

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