

CDL CELEBRATES PRIDE MONTH



Anthony Gatensby

Current Jurisdiction/Firm/Position: Partner, Blaney McMurtry LLP, Toronto

Year of Bar Call: 2015

1. Why a career in law? (What are you most excited or passionate about?)

Some people plan their whole lives to be a lawyer. Some people fall into the profession, not knowing what else to do after school. I think I fell somewhere in the middle.

My childhood was a humble one. I was the eldest of five boys, raised mostly by my mom and my grandmother who worked hard to just make sure we didn't go without. Growing up without much, particularly as a young queer youth, I saw a career in law as my key to financial stability to overcome those challenges.

In addition to financial freedom, I have found great internal satisfaction about being a lawyer and practicing law. Being a lawyer is, above all, a call to serve others. My area specifically, insurance coverage, demands a lifelong journey of learning and self-improvement. Staying up to date with legal trends and expanding my knowledge base not only allows me to provide the best possible representation to my clients but also keeps me intellectually stimulated and motivated.

2. What or who has influenced you and your career? (Do you have any mentors or people that inspired you in this profession?)

I've been quite fortunate to cross paths with numerous individuals who have influenced and inspired me in profound ways. Each person I have interacted with, whether a colleague, a client, and especially opposing counsel in the defence bar, has provided unique perspectives, insights, and experiences that have influenced my approach to the legal profession. I have learned that everyone has something valuable to offer, regardless of their level of expertise or experience.

Many of the individuals I went to law school with. Many of them have gone on to incredible things, in private practice, in public service, and internationally. It is incredible to see.

But most of all, I'm also constantly inspired every day by my two long-term partners, John McIntyre, and Juan Seclen, who continue to do incredible things in their work. John just opened his own law firm, adding to the small but growing number of LGBTQAI+ business owners.

3. What are some obstacles or challenges in your current practice?

I made partner at Blaney McMurtry LLP in 2021. It marked a significant milestone in my legal career.

Becoming a partner required a transformative mental shift – I was no longer the associate with someone else ultimately responsible for connecting with clients, overseeing work product, or providing direction on files. That was me.

Transitioning from associate to partner continues to be both exhilarating and challenging. It required me to adopt a proactive mindset, taking full responsibility for the overall client experience. This meant going beyond simply providing legal advice on a task-by-task basis and taking ownership over that connection. It also required me to involve myself more in the operation of the firm as a larger stakeholder.

One of the biggest challenges now is just growing my team!

4. How has the legal profession changed since you started practicing?

It is no secret that practicing law can be stuffy and overly formal. Pre-pandemic, it would be rare to see any lawyer in a mid-size to large firm wearing anything but a suit, except on casual Fridays. The idea of "facetime" was still pretty significant.

Even the amount of paper most firms were moving through was excessive – in 2020!

The day-to-day practice of law has completely shifted since then. Remote work and virtual court proceedings have become the norm, leading to a greater reliance on technology and digital platforms. Most firms are electronic. A lot of these changes were well overdue and have huge cost-savings.

There is no doubt that this shift has both challenges and benefits. While it has increased accessibility and efficiency in some ways, it has also created new obstacles – like learning how to connect with colleagues without that regular face-to-face contact. Establishing community is a hard thing to do when we spend physical time apart.

Overall, I think the changes are for the best, and really the dust hasn't settled yet on how the legal profession will look in the next few years.

5. What was your career-defining moment? How did it shape, change, or reinforce your practice?

I don't think I can refer to any single moment in my practice as "career-defining". At its core, the practice of law is a call to serve on behalf of another. It is a privilege that we should never take for granted.

In that light, I see every case that I handle as an opportunity to be an advocate, to be a representative for a client that needs your advice and your skillset. Every case presents an opportunity for growth, learning, and honing my skills as a coverage litigator.

I do look back fondly at my cases in the Court of Appeal over the last few years, including the recent case of *Loblaws v. RSA et al* which was heard over 2 days in April. The chance to dramatically shape the case law in my field of practice is a particularly rewarding experience.

6. What does diversity and inclusion for Canadian defense lawyers look like to you? [answered together]

It's often said that the legal profession should look like the public it serves. That sentiment is no less true today than it was 50 years ago. Diversity and inclusion for lawyers today means creating a legal profession where individuals from all walks of life, are welcomed, respected, and given equal opportunities to succeed.

More than that, diversity and inclusion entail creating an environment where LGBTQAI+ lawyers can thrive, with support networks, mentorship opportunities, and policies that combat discrimination.

While we have made huge strides in terms of elevating some of the LGBTQAI+ community in the legal profession, many minorities – such as trans individuals or those in non-monogamous family structures – continue to be challenged by persisting stigma. And as we can see in the United States, progress can be rolled back without much second thought.