Foundation of Leadership: Richard A. "Dick" Williams

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In honor of our firm's 70th anniversary, we are proud to share the stories of our founding leaders – the attorneys who are Mitchell, Williams, Selig, Gates & Woodyard, P.L.L.C. Here, we are sharing the legacy of Richard A. "Dick" Williams.

A named partner, distinguished attorney and legal visionary, Richard A. "Dick" Williams has long been dedicated to best practices in law firm management and creating operational policies which continue within our firm today.

Dick was born in Fort Worth, Texas. He graduated from the University of Texas with a bachelor's degree in journalism and earned a Juris Doctor from the University of Texas School of Law. After law school, Dick moved to Washington to work in the Office of Chief Counsel at the Internal Revenue Service followed by his work as a clerk for a United States Tax Court judge. In both positions, he gained extensive knowledge and experience in the application of tax law. After his time in Washington, he and his family moved to Arkansas where he joined the firm of Wright, Lindsey & Jennings as their only tax lawyer. In 1975, Dick left to form his own firm, Williams, Selig & Sayre, which concentrated on tax and securities law. As Williams, Selig & Sayre grew, Dick recognized that while the firm was focused on tax and securities work, it lacked the capabilities to offer clients legal services in litigation and other legal areas. He began to look at other law firms in Little Rock that would be a good fit for a merger. He contacted Maurice Mitchell to discuss merging firms. On January 1, 1980, Dick and Maurice co-founded the firm that is Mitchell, Williams, Selig, Gates & Woodyard today.

The merger of the two firms created a full-service law firm. Dick built a thriving tax practice representing sellers of large corporations in several of the largest actions of their type ever to occur in Arkansas. He assisted clients with the preparation of complex estate plans involving corporate and partnership recapitalizations and multiple trusts. He is the only attorney from Arkansas to have lectured at the N.Y.U. Federal Tax Institute, the most prestigious tax program in America.

While he was practicing law, Dick was very active in the American Bar Association working on law firm management. He co-founded the American Bar Association Law Practice section which is committed to advancing the legal profession by focusing on critical operations such as finance, practice management, technology and marketing. In his tenure as co-chair, the Law Practice section grew to more than 25,000 members and remains active today. Dick served as co-chair of the first joint Canadian Bar and American Bar conference on law practice management held in Toronto. He served as editor of Legal Economics, the magazine published by the Section of Economics of Law Practice of the American Bar Association. He was a frequent speaker throughout North America on law firm management. Having established himself as a leader in law practice management, Dick had the opportunity to meet lawyers throughout North America and learn how law firms operated. He was able to cherry pick good policies and best practices and bring

them to Mitchell Williams. His knowledge and experience were instrumental in creating the firm's compensation committee. He often had colleagues come to firm retreats and advise on law firm management.

Because of his constant study of law firm management, Dick learned to recognize and seize opportunities for firm growth. He was instrumental in hiring Attorney Rick Beard to anchor the firm's litigation practice. Working together with named partner Bill Woodyard, he hired Ark Monroe to join the firm's insurance regulatory practice. Both Rick and Ark later served as managing partners of the firm. After years of working with Bentonville attorney Ernie Lawrence as co-counsel to represent high wealth individuals in estate planning, Dick negotiated the merger of Ernie's solo law practice to establish a Mitchell Williams office in Northwest Arkansas. To build the reputation of the firm's tax practice, Dick created the business development strategy of hosting tax seminars for clients, trust officers and certified public accountants. His goal was to provide valuable information to clients, build relationships with referral sources and give young tax lawyers the opportunity to learn business development skills.

Asked about the key to the firm's success through the years, Dick said, "We had good policies and we focused on taking opportunities when they appeared. We were the first law firm in the state to institutionalize practice development by hiring a marketing person to scientifically help us build our practices. We were the first law firm to have a website. The second factor is we really recruited and gave more opportunities to women than any other law firm in our state. Our female partners are significant contributors to the firm. In hindsight, hiring and promoting female attorneys propelled our firm. We were leaders in that effort, and I am very proud of that."

In addition to his tax practice, Dick has considerable experience representing Arkansas political figures. In 1977, he served as legal counsel for United States Senator Dale Bumpers advising him through his senate race. In 1988, when Senator Bumpers gave serious consideration to running for President of the United States, he set up his presidential campaign legal team. Dick also served as legal counsel to United States Congressman Ray Thornton who served six terms in Congress.

Dick has been committed to giving back to the community. In 2022, Dick received the W. Jay Jernigan Award for his 20 years of service to LifeQuest of Arkansas where he's served as co-chair of the curriculum committee, leads the Law Crew and lectures regularly on history.

In 2016, he was recognized as the grand honoree at the 13th annual Jane B. Mendel Tikkun Olam Awards by the Jewish Federation of Arkansas for his 60 years of public service. He served on Easter Seals of Arkansas board of directors for 16 years where he was instrumental in fundraising to support the organization's move to West Little Rock. He served on the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Foundation Fund board of directors, the Pulaski Technical College Development Foundation board and was active for many years in the Jewish Federation of Arkansas. He was also active in the legal profession, serving as the Arkansas Bar Association's first chair of the legal education council. He served as chair of the executive committee and co-chaired the campaign for the Arkansas Bar building.

Dick officially retired in 2010 and remains active. His dedication to law firm management, best practices and growth are central to the firm's strategies today. Dick said, "The thing I am most proud of is the creation of this law firm with Maurice Mitchell and John Selig. Building a big, successful law firm was always a dream of mine. Not by myself, but to team up with other people and build a great law firm, with the help of a lot of talented people, was something I always wanted to do."