

Shearman & Sterling's Richard Hsu

By Scott Graham

Richard Hsu, the chairman of Shearman & Sterling's IP transactional group, has an interesting hobby: He interviews other lawyers about their hobbies. His podcast, Hsu Untied, has ranged from Intel senior corporate counsel Darren Flagg's opera singing to Adobe GC Michael Dillon's cross-country bicycle trek to Santa Clara professor Eric Goldman's Slinky collection. We sat down with Hsu recently to explore what he's learned about lawyers and their lives away from work.



Jason Doly

Richard Hsu, Shearman & Sterling partner

How did this project get started?

I started my original blog, HsuTube, doing videos with my daughter. I explained complex issues of IP, and I had my daughter do these drawings. It was well-received, and people really liked it. My wife said to me, "Your only problem is, your daughter's not going to be 13 forever." That was exactly the problem, because after she got to be about 15, she was not interested in doing it anymore.

So I wanted to experiment with the audio medium. There were a couple of my friends who were lawyers, and they had really interesting side hobbies, and I thought, "Gee,

wouldn't it be interesting to talk with them about it?" When I started this thing I thought, literally, if I could get five or 10 interviewees, I'd really be lucky. And I think I just did my 97th interview yesterday.

How do you find people?

Originally it was almost all people that I knew. Some lawyers have contacted me now that the podcast is out. Our librarian in our office is terrific, and she keeps a lookout for good candidates. I also interview former lawyers who have gone on to interesting careers. For example, Will Shortz, who

is the editor of The New York Times' crossword puzzles, is a former lawyer, and Drew Shoals is a former lawyer who recently became the drummer for Train. I also interviewed Greg Raymer, who is a former lawyer who became a professional poker player.

Hard to top that for a second career.

Yeah. He was going through Vegas on his way to a job interview after finishing up the World Series of Poker, but he stayed and won the whole thing for \$5 million. He called his employer and said, "I don't think I'm going to be showing

up for that job interview,” and the employer said, “Yeah, we didn’t think so.”

Silicon Valley lawyers don’t seem like people who have a lot of leisure time. How do people find it?

I’m surprised myself at how much they find it. But you know, a lot of lawyers are very passionate about these hobbies. That’s one of the things I enjoy about it most. You commented about Eric Goldman’s Slinky hobby. Originally I thought, “That just doesn’t seem like much of a hobby.” But it was one of the best interviews I’ve done. Eric Goldman tweeted out himself, “Of the hundreds of interviews I’ve done, this may be the most fun.” I tapped into something he really loves.

What are some of the other interviews or hobbies that stood out to you?

A lawyer from Apple was an astronomer, that was pretty interesting. He talked about things exploding in galaxies nearby that you’d have no idea were happening. I interviewed somebody who makes wine. I’ve had a woodworker, a skydiver, an oil painter, a stand-up comedian and a magician. One lawyer cycled across the country and actually was a little emotional recounting what it was like. I’ve got one lawyer who’s a classical ballet dancer. It’s a big range, actually. I try to get into a little bit of the per-

son’s head and understand why the hobby means a lot to a person, which I think is more interesting than the hobby itself.

What themes have emerged as you talk to lawyers about their hobbies?

One is that as they’re doing the hobby, they totally lose track of themselves. They get completely consumed by the hobby. All of them love their jobs, it’s not like they’re doing it to escape from their jobs, but they also want something [else] they can be completely immersed in.

Do you think that’s something about the practice of law, requiring complete immersion into something different from time to time?

[Laughs] It’s hard to say. It may not be completely limited to lawyers. I’ll have to tell you that if I start interviewing nonlawyers.

What stands out about technology lawyers’ hobbies?

I do know a lot of IP lawyers. And I think those people tend to take a more engineering approach to their hobby. For example, the skydiver I interviewed is a patent lawyer and an engineer by training. Yes, he does the skydiving, but he also operates a ham radio while he’s diving and makes calculations about his dive. It was a very scientific and engineering approach. I’ve got another one that hasn’t been released yet, but he flies remote-controlled

airplanes, which are incredibly complicated to program. He also happens to be an IP lawyer who’s an engineer.

You’ve interviewed the chief privacy officer of Facebook, who was on “Survivor,” and the chief privacy officer from McAfee, who did a one-day stint as a runway fashion model. What is it about privacy officers with very public hobbies?

The interesting thing about Yul Kwon, who is head of privacy at Facebook, was that when he won “Survivor,” he actually self-classified as an introvert. That somebody who is an introvert would actually win a TV game show—that could have been the topic of a whole different interview.

Is this something you do as your own hobby, or does it tie into your practice at all?

It does seem like my own meta-hobby at the moment. People ask me how long are you going to do it, and I basically say, as long as I’m having fun at it. I did have a childhood dream of being like a Terry Gross or a Charlie Rose.