

Katelyn Quimby

Commercial Lit Clients Gain From Her Good Instincts and Competitive Spirit

by Dan Rafter

Good instincts. When praising the legal talents of Katelyn T. Quimby of **Miller Canfield**, it's the first trait cited by Kate Koppenhoefer, vice president and deputy general counsel with Chicago's Berkeley Research Group.

Quimby, an associate with the Chicago office of the Detroit-based law firm, earned her law degree from Northwestern University School of Law in 2008. By all accounts, the commercial litigator possesses the instincts and talent of lawyers with many more years of experience.

"Katelyn is excellent at spotting issues before others do," Koppenhoefer says. "She comes up with arguments that people wouldn't necessarily think of. It comes down to good instincts. She is excellent at identifying the primary issues that her clients face and then coming up with ways to resolve them."

Koppenhoefer is not alone in this opinion. During her relatively short career, Quimby has taken on several complex cases, representing clients battling enforcement actions brought by the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, and other federal and state agencies. She has taken on cases involving trade secret disputes, non-compete and non-solicitation matters, antitrust law and complex contract disputes.

Quimby's success while handling such a wide variety of cases is no surprise those who know her. She has always been a competitor, and she always enjoys a challenge.

Natural-born Competitor

"I grew up playing a lot of sports," Quimby says. "I liked being in the game. I enjoyed the competition of sports and the camaraderie of being on a team. Once I got to the point of thinking about what I wanted to do when I grew up, I began gravitating to law. That seemed like a field in which my competitive nature would be an asset."

Quimby traces her earliest interest in law to her high school days and a mock trial held in a history class. As soon as arguments began in the event, Quimby was hooked.

"The mock trial gave me the thrill of being in the game," Quimby says, "but intellectually, I figured, 'This might be something up my alley.'"

Quimby's interest in the law only grew once she began taking her undergraduate



classes at Colgate University. Her studies included the philosophy of law, which inspired Quimby to make attending law school her next goal. She wasn't sure she wanted to be a lawyer, but she figured she would certainly enjoy law school.

Quimby wasn't quite right about that last part.

"I really thought I would enjoy law school. That didn't turn out to be so true," she says. "It was a lot more difficult than I anticipated. But I knew that whatever I decided to do after graduating, having a law degree would help. I thought maybe if I decided to become a sports agent, for example, having that law degree would be an asset."

Then Quimby started taking on trial work while in law school, and it changed her ideas about a career in law. Quimby knew she not only had the right skills to

succeed as a lawyer, but also the passion for the career. Something about being in a courtroom inspired her.

"When you are in the courtroom, you have to be on your toes," Quimby says. "You have to come up with the right arguments on the spot. It's similar to playing a game. You have to think on your feet. You have to prepare for whatever comes your way. You have to effectively argue around issues and figure out a way to win."

"Even in the smaller battles, the everyday battles, you have to take what is thrown at you and work with it. You have to get a small victory out of it in whatever way you can."

Start in Wrongful Convictions

During her law school days at Northwestern, Quimby worked at the Bluhm Legal Clinic's Center on Wrongful

Convictions. In her third year, she was part of the group of students who took on the now-famous case of Brendan Dassey, the nephew of Steve Avery, and one of the subjects of Netflix's original documentary series *Making a Murderer*.

The Avery and Dassey cases have drawn headlines. Avery served 18 years in prison for sexual assault and attempted murder before being exonerated by DNA evidence in 2003. Two years later, Avery and his nephew were arrested and charged with murdering a female photographer.

Both Avery and Dassey were convicted in 2007, and the Center for Wrongful Convictions — now known as the Center for Wrongful Convictions of Youth — took on Dassey's case. The center continues to represent Dassey, whose conviction was recently overturned by a federal judge in Milwaukee.

Quimby was one of the first two students at Northwestern University to work on the case, helping to draft the first post-conviction brief on Dassey's behalf.

"Working on that case was amazing," Quimby says. "The work that went into it, the difference we were trying to make, it all was incredible. To be involved in something like that at such a young age made a big impression on me."

The Dassey case wasn't the only one that Quimby took on for the center. She worked on several smaller, yet also important cases, many of them involving eyewitness misidentifications. Most cases focused on suspects who confessed to police after long periods of questioning — not because they actually committed a crime, but because they wanted their questioning to finally end.

This work, too, left an impression on Quimby.

"This is such a ubiquitous thing happening in Chicago and around the country. People can be forced into confessing to something they didn't do," Quimby says. "People don't understand how it can happen, but it does. Helping individuals in that situation and bringing light to that topic was incredibly rewarding."

Moving to Commercial Litigation

Quimby will never forget her time at the Center for Wrongful Convictions or the professors and students with whom she worked. It was a rewarding experience.

She decided, however, not to pursue criminal law once she graduated from Northwestern.

"There is something incredibly intense about working on a case when there is an actual person's life on the other end," Quimby says. "It is intense in a good and bad way. After spending time on these cases and working for the center, I wasn't sure if I was cut out for a life filled with that kind of case day in and day out."

But there was one type of law that

fascinated Quimby: commercial trial law.

Commercial litigation offers its own type of challenges and rewards, Quimby says. People's livelihoods are often at stake in the cases she handles. To the people on the other end of these controversies, the work Quimby does is incredibly important.

"It is on a different scale, but it is still incredibly satisfying when you get a good result," Quimby says. "People are obviously passionate about any sort of lawsuit in which they are involved."

"Even when you are working with big companies, you get to know the clients and the people behind the case. The best part is when you get to call clients and tell them that you got the results they wanted. When you can save someone's company or get a project started that was stalled by litigation, that is a great feeling."

Quimby points to an example from last year. A client was trying to win a construction project that would have provided flood relief for homes in a Chicago-area community. The project, though, was stalled in litigation. Quimby and her fellow attorneys went to work, winning a preliminary injunction and a bench trial for the client.

"We ended up with the results the town wanted, and we helped alleviate problems for the people who live in that community," Quimby says.

Commercial law can also be quite complex. There are times when Quimby has to learn an entirely new industry to properly represent her clients. That hard work can also be gratifying, she says.



For instance, Quimby has worked on extremely complex trade secret cases in which she had to master a variety of technical aspects to properly represent her clients.

"It's all about knowing how to litigate a case," she says. "It's about taking the time to get to know the facts behind the case. Getting to know the case and the people is what I consider the most compelling aspect of commercial law."

"The fun days are when you earn those small victories on motions to dismiss or summary judgments. And it's even more enjoyable when you get to tell people that their company can still exist, that their product is safe from someone trying to encroach on it."

Always a Chance to Learn

Koppenhoefer says that anyone who has worked with Quimby would not be surprised by her success. When Quimby and Koppenhoefer practiced together at the same law firm, Koppenhoefer referred to the younger attorney as her right-hand person, the attorney she trusted with the most important work.

"She did everything for me on cases," Koppenhoefer says. "Coming up with motions, discovery issues, researching, arguing motions, interacting with clients — she did everything, the whole nine yards. She's a great attorney, absolutely excellent."

For Quimby, success has come down to a simple philosophy: She tries to learn something from every case and from every attorney with whom she's worked.

Her fellow attorneys have provided Quimby with valuable advice. Even in the cases in which Quimby has faced setbacks, she has learned about law, building a practice and serving clients.

Her advice to other young attorneys is simple, too: Be indispensable to someone.

"There are so many lawyers out there right now," Quimby says. "You have to make yourself indispensable on a case and to your firm. You have to find a way to make sure you are the person a partner wants to work with or the person a client wants to work with."

How do you become indispensable? Quimby says it's tied to understanding your strengths and weaknesses, and then not hesitating to speak up.

"It's about recognizing when a situation comes up for which you'd be the right person for a task or job," she says.

"It's when you realize that you have something in common with a client, or you have a background in that type of matter that can help on a case."

"Be sure to tell someone. No one else is going to know. You are the one who has to tell people that you are right for a job and that you need and deserve the opportunity to do it." ■