

Johnnie Q. Nguyen

A Motivated Young Lawyer's Journey to Opening His Own Firm

BY NAOMI NASSY

This past June marked the one-year anniversary of JQN Law Firm, a Denver-area practice solely run by a young and diverse family law attorney, Johnnie Q. Nguyen. In its first year alone, the firm handled over 24 cases with numerous settlements and successful outcomes, awarding majority parenting time, favorable division of assets, attorney fees, child support obligations, and more. Nguyen was also trusted to acquire numerous clients from the closing of a well-established family law firm in Denver. With this influx of clients, Nguyen was able to hire a law clerk for the firm as well.

With such success in opening his own firm, Nguyen has become a leader among young lawyers and the family law network. He couldn't do this alone; his network has been a vital support system in opening and operating his own firm. As he shares: "I lean on my friends in the Colorado legal community all the time for advice, resources, and connections. I'm blessed to know that whenever I feel stuck, someone in our community will know the answer." Nguyen hopes that his experience in starting JQN Law Firm can be passed along to other young and diverse lawyers seeking to start their own firm.

Access to Justice

Nguyen was motivated to pursue a career in the law after watching his refugee parents struggle to navigate our legal system. As refugees from the Vietnam War, his parents hardly understood English but still managed to apply for and pass the US citizenship test. Nguyen admired their resilience and hard work as they built a new life in America, applying for jobs, navigating healthcare, and putting three kids through public school with limited money and resources.



At a young age, Nguyen was thrust into "adulting." He explains, "Growing up as a native English speaker, I remember translating legal paperwork for them from as early as third grade. I had to step up for my parents because of their language barrier. But inevitably, my parents and I would make mistakes on paperwork, or I would watch my parents get scammed by businesses or other people, and the pain from this taught me early on about the importance of legal representation."

Learning by Leading

Born and raised in Colorado, Nguyen completed his undergraduate degree at the University of Colorado Denver and later graduated from the University of Colorado Law School in 2021. He tailored his time in law school to prepare him for the reality of attorney life while gaining leadership skills where he could.

"In law school, I tried to stay involved," he says. "At CU Law, I served as my class president for two years and I competed in mock trial. But more memorably, I served on the Board of Governors of the American Bar Association and as national chair of the ABA's Law Student Division. All these experiences often 'put me on the spot,' which trained me to quickly think on my feet as an attorney while still delivering substantive analysis for my colleagues and the court. My most impactful class in law school was an elective on law practice management taught by Jay Kamlet, owner and founder of LawBank. It provided me with helpful exposure to starting my own firm and running it in a thoughtful and successful manner."

After law school, Nguyen's first job was at a large law firm, where he acquired important foundational skills working as a trial lawyer. But he soon realized that it wasn't a great fit for him. "It was an intense environment, and I did not see it as sustainable. After some hard reflection, I needed to switch to an area of law that I cared about and that I could see myself doing long-term."

Continues Nguyen, "I remember taking family law in law school, and I really enjoyed the class. The subject also clicked fast for me when I studied it during the bar exam. So, I decided to spend some time learning at different family law firms. As time went on, I became inspired by a friend and former classmate, Nikki Nicholaou, who had opened up her own firm, Nomos Law. Listening to the newfound freedom and happiness she had as a solo attorney, I became quickly enticed. I then relied on the advice of other Colorado attorneys who started their own firms, namely Danaé Kinnett, Joi Kush, Maha Kamal, Kevin Cheney, and Todd Burnham. After a deep breath, I took the leap!"



Nguyen with his family in Hawaii.

Freedom, Happiness, and Growth

For many attorneys, the first few years out of law school are defining moments, often filled with deep self-reflection regarding the career they've entered and the sustainability of it. Certainly, Nguyen's path out of law school was a pivotal point in his career, teaching him the importance of taking his journey into his own hands.

"A very good friend told me once in passing that 'people who aren't happy in their career would rather complain about it than actually do something about it.' It made me reflect on the number of complaints I've made over the years working at firms being unhappy and unmotivated. At some point, I was just very honest with myself and said I wasn't happy and couldn't do what I was doing forever. Something had to change. So, I asked myself what I wanted in life, and I answered: freedom, happiness, and growth. In June, I reached the one-year anniversary of opening my own firm. And, it was the best decision I have ever made for my career, my family, and myself. I finally have the freedom to

take my career in the direction that I want and at the pace I want. I have the happiness in my career that I dreamt of for so long. And the growth of my firm is without limits—I could stay solo or grow my firm to be large one day. I feel like I'm finally telling my career where to go instead of having others tell me what to do with my career."

The Family Law Life

Life as a family law attorney, he says, involves a lot of phone calls and advising. "As a family law attorney, I'm 'on-call' a lot to respond to people's child or relationship emergencies. The job often requires explaining the legal process to lay individuals, and that can take a few phone calls with a client for the process to fully absorb."

"Outside of phone calls," he continues, "it's a fun balance of litigation and transactional work. On the litigation side, we're always filing and responding to motions and moving forward with trials. On the transaction side, we're always drafting prenuptial agreements, separation agreements, and parenting plans—all of which

dictate how divorces and parenting situations will pan out." Given the sensitive nature of these duties, Nguyen considers family law one of the most personal areas of law. "A lot of my clients lean on me for very stressful transitions in their lives related to their retirement funds, assets, children, and more."

The responsibility of handling such delicate family matters can make it challenging for attorneys to strike a good balance between their work lives and personal lives. Nguyen navigates this balance by setting healthy boundaries between managing the firm and staying present at home. "I've created a boundary to work when it makes sense to work instead of keeping a regimented schedule. My line of work is deadline and project based, so I just make sure everything gets done to the quality my clients deserve. Outside of this, I'm not stuck at my desk from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. trying to meet billable requirements. If I don't have a looming deadline, you'll find me at the gym, on a run, helping translate documents for my parents,



Nguyen and his fiancé's proposal.

or working on hobbies that are healing to me. This boundary was hard to establish because it was ingrained in me that if I didn't burn the midnight oil every night, I would be a bad attorney. But, after establishing this boundary, I've been so much happier in my everyday life, and it is reflected in my relationships with my family and friends."

With his ability to set healthy boundaries with work, Nguyen is able to focus on the life he wants to create outside of the law. "A lot of my life outside of work involves spending time with my friends. I was born and raised in Colorado,

and I have a very close group of friends that I see multiple times each week. They're my chosen family. We're always taking turns hosting dinners and movie nights, walking around Washington Park together, and celebrating each other's successes and life events. They are truly the greatest source of my happiness—second to my fiancé, Tanner, of course."

Managing his personal life, work life, and all things in-between didn't come easy for Nguyen. But his ability to reflect on what he truly wants out of a legal career has allowed him to identify his obstacles and establish a philosophy to guide

his future path. He says, "So far in my career, my biggest obstacle was dealing with anxiety. I was always anxious about getting cold-called in law school; giving a speech or oral argument; missing an issue on an exam; whether my writing was good enough for an employer; whether my day-to-day actions would upset my boss, who I would spend so much energy trying to appeal to; or whether I would be letting a client down. I'm still working on overcoming my anxiety every day. I'm always reminding myself that it's a drain on my mental health to worry about things I cannot control."

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His experience has guided his philosophy and in turn helped him develop a strong network of work friends and colleagues. "My philosophy is just about being nice and good to people. I always try to be an easy person to work with, whether I'm your lawyer, colleague, or opposing counsel. It has allowed me to create friendships with people and made me feel comfortable asking for help whenever I need it."

Grounded in Values:

Nguyen's Vision for the Future

When asked about long-term goals, Nguyen says, "This year, I'm getting married in November, so I'm taking it very, very easy on my career. I'm fully focused on having fun, starting my family, and creating a healthy foundation for my




Bachelor trip to Nashville.

life. Next year, I'm going to revisit my business plan to start expanding the firm. I'm at a point where I have more work than I can handle. But wherever I take my firm, I want to uphold my vision of being a quality legal practice that is settlement oriented and committed to finding the best solution for our clients, while being trial ready if needed."

Nguyen hopes to be a role model to those just starting their legal careers, those looking to open their own firm someday, or even those who just need a little motivation to get going. When asked what advice he would give to an aspiring law student or recent law grad, he says, "My advice is to stop networking like

we're told to do in law school. Instead, go build real friendships in the legal community. Offer help to others without expecting to receive it back. But don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it. When you start your own law firm, you'll want to lean on your friends rather than a 'network.' And being a lawyer this way is just much more fun."

With a strong sense of self, a solid mission for his career, and a philosophy built on creating community, Nguyen has been able to take his career into his own hands and create a firm founded on community and access to justice. JQN Law Firm is proud to be part of the family law network. 



Naomi Nassy is a law clerk for JQN Law Firm and a recent graduate from the University of Denver. With a background in political advocacy and community organizing, she plans to attend law school starting in fall 2026 and hold a career in public service post law school.