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Dynamic Duo

Family law firm Shebby Hirashima is powered by uniquely complementary partners.

By Shane Nelson
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Litigator Kristen K. Hirashima grew up working on her parents' strawberry farm in Oxnard.

"It's hard work," the Shebby Hirashima LLP partner said with a chuckle. "My brothers are cut out for it. I wasn't."

Although Hirashima said she knew early she wanted to be a professional and "get off the farm" – a goal her parents encouraged – that working-class upbringing is something Hirashima shares in common today with her firm's other name partner: David P. Shebby.

"We don't come from lawyers' families," Hirashima said. "That's been very important to Dave and I. That work ethic, that common sense, and that background has been really important to our firm."

Hirashima started working with Shebby in 2011 while she was still in law school, but the two hit it off quickly, according to Shebby, who said he didn't waste much time before asking Hirashima to consider a long-term position.

"We've been inseparable ever since," Shebby explained. "She ended up blowing off her third-year of law school to work for me pretty much full time. She worked for me as an associate, and she became a partner and then named partner last year."

Today, the family law litigation boutique specializes in divorce, child custody and domestic violence restraining orders, according to Shebby, who spent the first decade of his career handling corporate litigation.

"It wasn't a great fit for me," he said of that early focus. "I found that just working with the corporate entities wasn't particularly rewarding."

Around the turn of the century, Shebby said he realized he was missing out on quite a bit of family law business and decided to dedicate himself to learning the new area. And thanks to

what he described as the patient mentorship of some generous family law attorneys, a great deal of study, and his already solid understanding of the evidence and civil procedure codes, he has found the move a terrific fit since then.

"I was able to have an immediate impact on people's lives," Shebby said. "And I enjoyed that very much."

Many family law attorneys say the practice frequently entails working with people during the most difficult times of their lives, and Shebby insisted that's a challenge he finds especially rewarding.

"They require not just sophisticated legal advice but an awful lot of good common sense," he said of clients. "An awful lot of what we do is tell people not just what they can do, but help them make smart decisions about what they should do. It's a lot of counselor-at-law work in addition to litigating."

Hirashima also finds fulfillment from helping clients through such difficult life challenges, but she said the pandemic has had a significant impact on matters the firm is handling.

"We're focusing less on the day-to-day divorce stuff, like dividing assets," Hirashima said. "People seem to be putting that on hold. It seems like we're dealing with a lot of the stuff that can't be put on hold, such as custody modification, domestic violence, or if somebody has a support obligation they can no longer afford because they've taken a hit in their income."

Saying the firm is "not inexpensive," Shebby noted most of the four-attorney shop's clients are mid- or late-career professionals. And while that market has not seen a substantial rise in domestic violence issues over the course of the pandemic and the resulting stay-at-home restrictions, according to Shebby other communities have seen a spike.

"I'm on the board of a nonprofit that provides family law legal services to very low-income folks," he explained. "And there's definitely been an increase



Courtesy of Shebby Hirashima LLP and Raffi Alexander

David P. Shebby and Kristen K. Hirashima of Shebby Hirashima LLP.

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in domestic violence cases we've seen there."

Los Angeles family law attorney Gregory W. Jessner, who has opposed Shebby Hirashima a number of times over the years, didn't hesitate to describe the firm's senior name partner as a terrific lawyer.

"He's easily one of the best attorneys practicing in family law right now," Jessner said of Shebby. "And some very good family law attorneys don't necessarily like to go to court that much, but Dave is someone who is utterly comfortable in court."

Los Angeles family law attorney Lisa H. Meyer, who's also opposed Shebby many times over the past decade, echoed Jessner's sentiments.

"He's very dynamic, very strong, very much in command," Meyer said of Shebby's approach in the courtroom.

Meyer also recalled the first time she watched Shebby depose a witness.

"He was awesome," Meyer said. "He knew the evidence code. He was very commanding, very forceful but in a very nice way. He wasn't a jerk."

Hirashima also spoke glowingly of Shebby's courtroom approach, noting she sits second chair on all the matters the firm litigates. And Shebby had high praise for Hirashima, saying her strengths in the courtroom are very complementary to his own.

"She has the ability to synthesize a vast amount of information in a file and have that in the front of her brain in a way that's remarkable," Shebby said. "If I'm cross-examining somebody, and they say something inconsistent with anything in their – for example – very large, 3-year-old file, she can identify it immediately, pull up the impeaching evidence, and hand it to me on the fly in a way I've never seen anybody else be able to do."

Jessner, who has also co-chaired cases with Shebby Hirashima over the years, was quick to praise the firm's younger name partner, too.

"Kristen has maturity that goes beyond her experience level," he said. "And her interpersonal skills are really outstanding. She's a really strong asset for that firm."

According to Hirashima, though, the firm owes a great deal of its success today to her partner's humility.

"I was 25 when I started working with him," Hirashima said of Shebby. "I didn't know anything and he raised me up. ... I think it takes a special kind of person to be able to shift their perspective and to now see me as an equal and defer to me a lot of time on how I think the firm should be run. That takes a very special kind of person, and I just don't know many other people who could have done it."