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Never Resting, Never Still

Joe Tucker Jr., shown here casting into the Wissahickon Creek

When attorney **Joe Tucker Jr.** steps in a courtroom, he brings the same qualities he hones waist deep in a trout stream: focus, precision, and patience.

by **Matt Cosentino**

Whether he's fly fishing close to home in the Wissahickon Creek or in bodies of water in far-flung places like New Zealand or Central Africa, Joe Tucker Jr.'s favorite hobby always takes him a world away from his North Philadelphia roots. On the surface, those serene settings would also seem to be quite the contrast from the courtrooms in which he has become a nationally renowned attorney with wide-ranging expertise. At closer glance, however, fly fishing and advocating for a client require the same discipline and share many of the same traits.

That discipline has defined Tucker's rise from a rowhouse in North Philadelphia to become one of the most versatile and respected trial lawyers in America—and now, the President of the prestigious International Academy of Trial Lawyers.

What sets Tucker apart? Versatility. Tucker is a rare trial lawyer who excels on both sides of the courtroom, prosecuting catastrophic personal injury cases and defending major institutions and corporations with equal force and skill.

"That's why I say I'm the attorney you wish you had called first," he says. "Working on both sides of the courtroom gives me insight into the theories that the other side may put forward, and that's something I often market to my clients. Because I do the other side, I have a better understanding of what the other side may be thinking or the approaches that may be coming."

Fly fishing before a big case helps Tucker focus, and he often goes on excursions after a trial ends to relieve the pressure. Another personal passion, cycling, offers similar benefits.

"I like the way it airs my mind out," he says. "All of these are focused activities and you have to be in the moment, whether it's trial work, fly fishing, or cycling, and they all require patience and endurance. When it comes to trial work, I'm singularly focused on my clients' objectives, whether it's a plaintiff or a defendant."

Tucker's ability to remain poised during the ups and downs of a trial and his strategic insight have made him an in-demand attorney for a long list of high-profile cases; he has even been brought in at the end of a trial to sway momentum in a certain direction. The way he commands a courtroom, one would never guess that he overcome a stutter as a child with the help of the Philadelphia public school system, thereby enabling him to pursue his dream.

"I love being a trial lawyer, and I love the concept of the adversarial process," he says. "I think this is one of the greatest processes that we have in the world. Two people, despite the size of one party against the other party, have their issues decided not in the streets by people dueling with guns, but with 12 people who get to hear the facts and to make a decision. The idea of being a trial lawyer is all I ever wanted to be."

Versatility has been a hallmark of Tucker's career and his firm, Tucker Law Group, which he established in 1993 by himself out of the kitchen in his Northern Liberties home. His team has since grown to 11 lawyers, with office locations in Philadelphia and New Jersey. The firm's client list includes individuals, Fortune 500 companies, universities, health systems, pharmaceutical companies, and civil rights organizations in practice areas such as employment law, higher education law, complex civil litigation, catastrophic personal

Wissahickon Creek photo by Alison Dunlap; others courtesy of Joe Tucker

Tucker with some of his recent catches

injury, and civil and constitutional rights litigation.

"I look for people who want to practice law in an atmosphere where we don't do the same thing every day," Tucker says. "You have to be versatile, because even when we're doing plaintiffs' work, no one case is exactly the same. Whether we're suing [a local cultural institution] for having a portrait that was looted during the Holocaust, or prosecuting a case where babies have been killed at [a local health system] because of medical malpractice, it can be nerve-wracking, but it's always intellectually challenging."

In higher education law, Tucker represents colleges and universities in employment disputes, including tenure, as well as in cases of First Amendment rights and student safety issues. One major case he handled involved a defamation lawsuit initiated by a former dean at a university. After Tucker deposed the plaintiff for five days, the U.S. attorney reviewed the transcripts and ended up prosecuting and convicting the former dean for fraud.

In his employment law practice, a recent area of focus is defending DEI employees who have suddenly been terminated from their companies or law firms without cause, along with sexual harassment and discrimination cases. He also handles plaintiffs' and defense work for cases involving medical malpractice or product liability. In one instance, after successfully negotiating a plaintiff's settlement against a major corporation, that same company hired him for defense work in a separate case because they were so impressed with his skills.

Tucker's influence extends beyond his own career. He is a longtime member of the International Academy of Trial Lawyers, an invitation-only organization limited to 500 trial lawyers from the United States and 150 fellows from 30 different countries that champions the Rule of Law.

He became President of the Academy in March, and he has hit the ground running in his one-year term by filing briefs on behalf of law firms that have been targeted by the Trump administration. The Academy's board also issued a unanimous declaration that the death penalty be abolished.

"Because of what's going on now with the attacks on the Rule of Law," he continues, "I believe that I am a good voice to speak on the significance of the attacks on the Rule of Law on behalf of the Academy." He has even started a weekly podcast called *The Rule of Law: The Academy Speaks* that centers upon relevant legal topics.

Yet, even with a national profile, Tucker remains laser-focused on his clients.

"At the end of the day, whether I'm representing a catastrophically injured family or defending a university in a high-profile case, it's the same: I'm all in," he adds. "I don't believe in half measures. I want to win the trial the same way I want to land that elusive fish."

He offers simple advice to clients considering their next legal move: "Hire a lawyer who knows how to win—no matter which side of the courtroom they're standing on."

He's been doing that now for more than 30 years, winning cases and landing fish. ■

Tucker pursuing his other personal passion, cycling

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