

THE CHIEF NAVIGATORS



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THE 10
MOST
Inspiring
BUSINESS
LEADERS
TO WATCH IN 2024

Dr. John J. Maalouf
Senior Partner
Maalouf Ashford & Talbot, LLP

Dr. John J. Maalouf

Mastering the Art of International Business Law

Dr. John J. Maalouf is Senior Partner of Maalouf Ashford & Talbot, LLP, a leading Wall Street law firm with offices in financial centers across the globe including New York City, London, Paris, Zurich, Dubai, Riyadh, Morocco, Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan and South Africa.

Dr. Maalouf has been Ranked as one of the Top 10 International Trade & Finance Lawyers in the United States for the past 18 consecutive years by the U.S. Lawyer Rankings, 2006 – 2023 Editions, taking the No.: 1 spot on The List for the past six years in a row. Additionally, Dr. Maalouf is a globally recognized expert in the areas of International Arbitration, Business Law, Corporate Law, Banking Law, Mergers & Acquisitions, Oil & Gas Law, Energy Law, Islamic Finance Law, Shipping & Maritime Law, Mining Law and Intellectual Property Law.

- **Could you share the story of how you embarked on your legal career and eventually became a senior partner at Maalouf Ashford & Talbot, LLP?**

About 20 years ago I was a young partner at an international law firm based in New York City when one day a Senior Partner invited me to lunch. We were enjoying a pleasant conversation when he commented on the fact that I was handling a large number of complex matters for several Fortune 500 Companies, and in summary, informed me that he was “stepping in” and taking control of these clients. In New York City law firms this is sometimes referred to as a “client grab”, where a Senior Partner takes a younger partner's clients, after which the younger partner becomes a “superfluous expense” and is usually terminated. Fortunately for me, my clients didn't want the Senior Partner working on their matters, and when the Senior Partner pushed in an unprofessional manner, I resigned, took my clients with me and started my own law firm. I understand that the old firm's Office Management Committee called the Senior Partner before them to explain why the firm lost 16 Fortune 500 clients in one week, and that they accepted his resignation from the OMC on the spot and demoted him to “Of Counsel”. Two years later he was terminated. Sometimes Karma does work.

- **What strategies do you employ to attract top legal talent and maintain high standards of legal service delivery across different practice areas?**

Maalouf Ashford & Talbot is the definition of a meritocracy, nothing more and nothing less. We do not care about a person's race, religion, skin color, country of origin, political views, or any other such irrelevant factors. Talent, integrity, drive, intellect, work ethic and a commitment to excellence form the sole basis for



“The great virtue of a meritocracy is that it does not care about a person's color, race, or religion, it only cares about a person's abilities. It is the most effective system in existence which enables people from all walks of life to interact with one another for their mutual benefit.”



our hiring decision. To be clear, it would be highly unprofessional, not to mention unethical, to assign a lawyer to a matter if that lawyer was only hired on the basis of extraneous factors. Quite literally, only one lawyer in a million has the skill, talent and intellect to handle the types of complex matters which we work on at Maalouf Ashford & Talbot.

- **As a globally recognized expert in various fields of law, what do you consider to be some of your most significant contributions or accomplishments in your career?**

Over the past 30+ years, I'm humbled to have successfully represented clients in over 70 cross border M&A transactions and over 100 international arbitrations, among my many other accomplishments. Whether representing a client in a cross border M&A

“I always prefer to find an amicable resolution to a dispute whenever possible, however when it's time to fight, then fight as if you're the third monkey on the ramp to Noah's Ark, and it just started to rain.”

or an international arbitration, a successful lawyer must first and foremost be cunning, shrewd and an enigmatic strategist. He must have the ability to analyze any given situation quickly and efficiently, and discern the most intricate and minute details which others fail to perceive. The successful strategist must then have the ability to manipulate his adversaries, lay traps for them, and convince his opponents to take certain actions which they believe to be in their own best interests, but which, in reality, are beneficial to the strategist's clients. While doing so, the strategist must remain inscrutable and

enigmatic, so as to prevent his opponent from discerning his true intentions.

- **How do you cultivate a culture of excellence and innovation within Maalouf Ashford & Talbot, LLP, contributing to the firm's recognition as "Law Firm of the Year" in numerous countries and categories?**

As you know, Maalouf Ashford & Talbot, has been named “Law Firm of the Year” in the US and internationally in numerous categories including: International Trade & Finance Law, Arbitration & Litigation, Corporate Law, M&A Law, Antitrust Law, Banking & Finance Law, Capital Markets Law, Securities Law, Oil & Gas Law, Renewable Energy Law, Regulatory & Compliance, Venture Capital Law, Project Finance Law, Real Estate Law, Private Equity Law, Tax Law, Intellectual Property Law, Islamic Finance Law, Shipping & Maritime Law, and Mining Law.

We retain talent by evaluating our lawyers in a completely fair and even handed manner, out without taking into account factors such as friendship, race, religion, etc., and we reward excellence handsomely, well above industry standards.

- **Being consistently ranked as one of the top international trade and finance lawyers in the United States is a remarkable achievement. What do you attribute this recognition to, and how do you maintain such a high level of excellence year after year?**

It can take 30 years for a lawyer to build his reputation, but only 30 minutes to destroy it. As I explain to my junior lawyers, the noble practice of law is not about the pursuit of material wealth, but rather holding ourselves to the highest moral standards and putting the best interests of our clients first. Sometimes that means settling a case on

excellent terms which will allow the client to maintain a strong working relationship with a counter-party and generate profits for many years to come. Although doing so will result in far lower legal fees than a lengthy and protracted litigation or arbitration, the lawyer will have earned the trust and respect of his client, which is far more valuable than a mere few dollars.

- **Can you share any memorable experiences or cases that have shaped your legal career and contributed to your reputation as a leading legal expert?**

As a young lawyer I was heavily involved in the IPO Laddering cases in which 309 companies and the 55 investment banks which took them public (IPO's) were all the subject of a huge Department of Justice investigation. At the time, one of the Senior Partners of my firm was invited to a meeting attended by many of the most prominent lawyers in the country, who were all collaborating on how best to handle this matter, and I was fortunate enough to tag along. Although I was the youngest lawyer in the War Room by at least 15 years, I had come up with an idea which I knew would make or break the case, and incidentally, make or break my career. Nevertheless, as the Room contained many of the most distinguished lawyers in the field, I hesitated to say anything. Several hours into the meeting, however, no one had come up with an idea of how to defend against the allegations, so I decided to take the chance. After about 20 minutes of explaining my idea in a lengthy monologue, while people were looking at me with expressions on their faces which clearly said: “this kid is either brilliant or a complete idiot” one of the most senior lawyers in the room slowly rose to his feet, pointed a wavering finger at me and said three words: “the kid's right”. From that day forward my reputation as “The Ideas Man” was well established on Wall Street.

