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LAW FIRM BUSINESS

Built on direct communication

By David McAfee

Daily Journal Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES — As friends, R. Scott Brink and Paul W. Ritsema often talk about their love for cars or their similar Midwest upbringings. Recently, though, the two men sat down as colleagues to discuss what they believe helped propel their 13-year business relationship.

“We had the right chemistry,” said Brink, a labor and employment partner with Jeffer Mangels Butler & Mitchell LLP. “We are always on the same wavelength.”

Although the conversation occasionally drifted toward legal fees, the two lawyers seemed most interested in talking about the little things that had a positive impact on their partnership. Ritsema, an assistant general counsel with Volkswagen Group of America Inc., said he loves being able to reach Brink directly, without going through an assistant.

“Scott answers his own phone and his cell phone and his e-mails and his text messages,” he said. “That’s important to me.”

Small, but no less important, Ritsema said, is the plain efficiency of Brink’s outgoing voice message.

“It’s all stuff you’d expect but you don’t always get.”

The two attorneys were introduced in 1998 based on an existing relationship between Volkswagen and Jeffer Mangels. Their first joint effort was a discrimination case in San Diego that was resolved successfully. Since then, their partnership has grown and, according to both lawyers, mutual trust has been a key factor in that growth.

“Scott has gotten to the point where I feel like he is an extension of the office of the general counsel,” Ritsema said.

Over time, Ritsema said he has become so confident in Brink that he has given him



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Paul W. Ritsema, assistant general counsel with Volkswagen Group of America Inc., and R. Scott Brink, labor and employment partner with Jeffer Mangels Butler & Mitchell LLP.

direct access to company managers for training and other purposes.

As they talked, the two men appeared genuinely comfortable with one another, and they agreed on the importance of knowing when to fight and when to keep the ammo dry.

“In employment litigation work that I do for Volkswagen, there’s no money for the company to make,” Brink said. “It’s always a question of what the cost is on the dollar side and on the intangibles.”

Brink and Ritsema discussed the upside of maintaining a working personal friendship that reaffirms the mutual confidence they have in their business lives.

“It’s nice to be able to have a business relationship with people you like and respect,” Ritsema said. “Once I find a lawyer that I like, I’m going to stick with that lawyer through thick and thin, unless the relationship just doesn’t work anymore.”

The two attorneys said they have worked hard to make sure the business side of their

Firm lawyer: R. Scott Brink, Jeffer Mangels Butler & Mitchell LLP, Los Angeles

Client: Paul Ritsema, assistant general counsel for labor & employment, Volkswagen Group of America Inc., Herndon, Virginia

Practice Area: Labor & Employment and Class-Action Litigation

Length of Relationship: 13 years

Key Cases for Client:

- *Calzaretta v. Volkswagen of America*
- *Adverse Teamsters Local 495* (collective bargaining negotiation)
- *Chavez v. Volkswagen of America*
- *Von Gaertner v. Volkswagen of America*

relationship doesn’t falter. Through open communication and careful planning, Brink and Ritsema have been able to stay on the same page during the heat of litigation.

“We try not to have any surprises,” Brink said. “You can plan for a disaster, and you can plan for victory and everything in between. We try to do that so that we know what we are working with.”