

The Boss: Charles Robert Bone, Bone McAllester Norton PLLC

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In recent years, Charles Robert Bone has represented some of the city's biggest names, including the Convention Center Authority, which oversees Music City Center, and the investment group that is planning a \$1 billion overhaul of the former LifeWay Christian Resources campus downtown. Bone — who just finished his first year as president and CEO of Bone McAllester Norton — spends his time juggling his clients' demands, his civic roles and the needs of his four children.



NATHAN MORGAN | NASHVILLE BUSINESS JOURNAL
Charles Robert Bone, president and CEO of
Bone McAllester Norton PLLC

The president and CEO role is still fairly new to you. How have you adjusted?

It's been interesting. Previously, I did a lot of the business and financial work, but didn't have some of the HR responsibilities. As you can imagine, we have 40 lawyers, and we say 38 of those 40 are happy every day, just a different 38. It's interesting juggling the different personalities of our folks. Our system attracts really entrepreneurial-minded attorneys, so with that comes its own strengths and challenges, like wanting to rethink how we do things. So it's helpful because you always want to stay on the edge, but when you have a handful of people coming to you every day wanting to rethink how we do things, it's helpful and it's difficult.

Your father also is an attorney. Is law a family thing? My father grew up on a farm and prayed if he could get off the farm, then he was never going to go back. So I grew up around my father practicing law, and I went to law school not thinking I was going to practice law. I'm not sure what I thought I was going to do, but one thing led to another and I started with another firm and joined here in 2004.

Do you think it's rubbing off on your children the way the profession rubbed off on you? I might be doing the same thing to my children. Two of my kids got into a fight the other afternoon, not a fight fight, and I heard one of them saying, "I was just doing that under self-defense." I remember one night when our girls were little, I let them all sleep in the bed together, and I went up there and said, "Listen, you all get one chance, and if I have to come up here, you're all going to your own beds." One of my daughters goes, "I have a question: Is that one chance each or one chance total?"

You're a seventh-generation Middle Tennessean. How does that make you view things differently? What I love about Nashville currently is the momentum the city has, and that momentum is not easy to get, especially having grown up here my entire life, and from a professional standpoint doing a fair amount of traveling, I see lots of cities that don't have that momentum. But what makes Nashville unique is that we also just have this authenticity as a city about who we are and how we got here, and I like the perspective of trying to balance those two. ... I think very few cities can compete with that.

Do you get annoyed when people say you're a unicorn in the new Nashville? I wear it like a badge of honor. I'm proud to tell people I was raised here. All this growth and diversity is wonderful. It reflects the spirit of the city and who we are – it's a growing, vibrant and welcoming city. I appreciate the leadership we have that have gotten us this far.

You've been politically active in Nashville for years, including running for mayor. What did you learn from that experience? What a great place Nashville is. I thought I knew what a great place Nashville was, but when you really begin to look at what has made Nashville successful compared to other cities, you see that we have something here that is so unique and so special. I think it's unrivaled anywhere in the country.

Would you ever run for public office again? I might. I didn't run because I thought it would be a fun exercise and a great way to spend my time and energy and money. I ran because I very much wanted to see Nashville continue that momentum and continue it in a responsible way. I'm thrilled Mayor Barry has done that. ... If there was another opportunity down the road, I would welcome that, but I don't lay awake at night waiting for when I could run again and what for.

You're a political junkie. Tell me: What's your favorite moment in American political history, and why? When President [Barack] Obama was elected in November 2008. I had worked for Harold Ford as his finance chair in 2006, and had gotten to know Sen. Obama just a little bit during that process because he came here to campaign for Harold and help us raise money, and I just thought that was kind of the next step in this. One, Sen. Obama at the time had been incredibly nice to me. Two, I thought his profile sent a really powerful message about where we were as a country. I thought it sent the right message internationally as to who we were, and I thought it sent the right message to my children about how this is a country that can value diversity. I know we still have a really long way to go on those issues, but to me that was the right one that signaled this could happen in America.

If you could have dinner with one president, alive or dead, who would you choose? Ronald Reagan.

Why? I like his style. I like the fact that he and Tip O'Neill could go at it all day long but could get together for a drink at the end of the night. And this probably says something about that era of politics, but at least the way I view Ronald Reagan is that we can disagree, but that doesn't make you a bad person. I thought he seemed like such a gentleman and cared about people regardless of party. Do I agree with everything he did from a policy standpoint? Absolutely not, but it seems to me the way he went about doing that job is something I can have tremendous respect for.

There have been some outlandish project proposals lately in Nashville. Which is your favorite? I'm bullish on the drive-in theatre. I like all of them, and I think they're all neat as long as we balance how they fit. The business model of the drive-in theatre is most intriguing.

What do you think Nashville needs next? Soccer. The trends of professional sports are headed in terms of popularity, acceptance and growth to soccer, and to potentially do that at the Fairgrounds would be a win-win for the city. I'm not on the steering committee and I'm not being paid to say this.

What do you think our city's biggest challenge is currently? Transit. I think it's obviously how we work to address congestion within Nashville, but also how we plan for five years from now and in a way that ties into the region with balancing

that with changes we know are coming in transit from a technology side and innovation side and a generational side.

You have four children — what's your favorite thing to do with them? Typically go to a movie. That's often the one time everyone can agree and settle down. We started a new tradition that on Thanksgiving everyone comes to our house for dinner, so we have nothing to do during the day, so as a family we go to a movie together. The first time we did this I went to get our tickets online because I knew Thanksgiving night was always busy, and we went to see "Frozen." We were the only people in the movie theatre at 11:30 on a Thursday morning.

What worries you the most about raising children in modern America? Social media.

How do you protect them from it? I don't know that you can. Obviously, we can lay down some guidelines for our kids, but I don't know what the concern could have been that my parents would have had for me. So much of what happens on social media is this cross between good judgment and what's appropriate and peer pressure. I literally think about it all the time, and all my kids have a different approach to it. We try to set age limits and time, but when I grew up if I said something to somebody, then it was memorialized for the rest of my life. And if I had a picture that I had to go to Walgreens or Kodak to get developed, I could do with that picture what I wanted. So I try to impress upon my kids that not only that what they say can be self-destructive to their reputation, but also that how you interact with other people having a tremendous impact on them as well, like if you post a picture and someone has been left out. It just scares me to death.

What have you learned from your kids? Resiliency. Kids are tough, and you try hard to not shield them and let them make their own mistakes. It just seems like kids can bounce back from anything. Obviously, having two teenage girls has given me an appreciation for things I've never understood before and I'm never sure I will understand, so I just have to go with the flow and ride it out. Kids are tough, and I mean that in a positive way. They've got the ability to compartmentalize, bounce back and put stuff behind them.

Any favorite TV shows? I like "Veep" and "Billions." I was a huge fan of "24," and I love that they brought that back last summer. I wish they would do it again.

Do you binge watch? I really don't. I tried to watch "House of Cards," but the last thing I binge watched was "Narcos." I watch a lot of sports, and I try to convince my family that's the real reality TV.

Favorite sport? Football.

College or professional? Both.

College team? Tennessee. I grew up a huge UT football fan.

What do you think of the team? I'm OK. I'm hanging in there with Butch Jones. If you think about where we are from a talent and depth standpoint, we are far ahead of where we were four years ago.

But that's because Derek Dooley didn't even know how to coach football. That's correct. But the SEC is competitive and we were one or two breaks away from having an incredible season, so it will be interesting to see this season when they don't have as many expectations put on them. Sometimes that's when things work out.

But we have no Jalen Hurd? We have no Jalen Hurd, no Josh Dobbs or Josh Malone, but there's a lot of talent there.

What's your favorite song? It's the Coldplay/Chainsmokers song "Something Just Like This."

But the lyrics in that song aren't that positive. Oh I don't know anything about the lyrics. I like the overlay of the DJ part of it.

Luckily they play it a lot. Oh yeah, I scan my XM channels, and my kids will say, "Hey your song is on," and I'm like, "Yes, I know."

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