

## WHAT CAN PHYSICISTS DO?

An interview series that profiles scientists who opted for careers outside of academia.

### Tyler Drye tackles challenges to technical patents

By **Toni Feder**

#### Patent attorney; Sterne, Kessler, Goldstein & Fox

BS, physics, Clemson University, 2009  
PhD, chemical physics, University of Maryland  
in College Park, 2014  
JD, George Mason University, 2022

#### What was your research focus?

Single-crystal growth and characterization of novel semiconductors and superconductors.

#### What were you looking for in a job?

I came to the realization that my PhD adviser spent most of his time writing grants and overseeing research. I liked being hands-on in the lab.

I thought I might want to be a researcher at a national lab, but I became aware of how the system

(Photo courtesy of Sternekessler.com.)



works: You have to tackle problems that get funding. The problems I wanted to work on may not always get funded, and the problems that get funding may not always be interesting. I started looking around to see what else I could do.

#### How did you end up in patents?

At a job fair, there was a booth from the US Patent and Trademark Office. They expressed interest in my background, and the idea of learning about new technologies and trying to understand things from an inventor's perspective appealed to me. I worked at the USPTO for a year and a half.

#### Where did you go from the USPTO?

In 2016, I moved to a law firm where the focus was on patent prosecution—from writing patents to getting them issued. After a few years, I went to law school. I was interested in working on different aspects of patents, including assertion of patent rights and challenges to patents. Three years ago, I joined Sterne, Kessler, Goldstein & Fox.

#### How do you spend your time?

The bulk of my time is spent reading and writing.

#### How do you use your physics?

Everything I do involves understanding the complex technologies that underlie patents. I take ideas in such fields as optics, materials chemistry, and medical devices and put them into language that examiners, judges, or laypeople can absorb.

#### What new skills have you needed?

Legal writing and research require a very high level of precision.

I've learned to handle disagreements with examiners and to understand and further clients' interests and goals. I've become a better listener. Those skills have made me a better person.

#### What do you like most?

It's rewarding when you get a good outcome for the client—money in damages, or permission to use technology. And I learn new things every day. **PT**

See also a 2022 PT interview with USPTO patent examiner Jami Valentine Miller and a 2017 PT story that provides a broad look at physicists in patent law.

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