



Q&A with Randy Houston



A career at the intersection of industries

From McNees to sports, media, entertainment, and the performing arts, Randy Houston has built a legal career shaped by range, creativity, and adaptability.

Randy Houston's career has crossed an unusually wide range of industries, but the throughline has remained remarkably consistent. A former McNees associate, Randy began his legal career in Harrisburg and built a foundation in intellectual property, litigation, and business law that would carry him into roles spanning private practice, sports media, digital media, and the performing arts.

Over the years, that path has included work at NBC Sports Group, Complex Networks, BuzzFeed, and The Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation, where he now serves as General Counsel and Corporate Secretary. Along the way, Randy has stayed rooted in the same core skills while adapting them to new environments, industries, and company cultures.

What makes Randy's story especially distinctive is that he has never approached creative industries strictly as an outsider. In addition to his legal career, he is also a musician, composer, writer, performer, and arts leader, giving him a firsthand understanding of the people and work behind the legal questions.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

● **McNees Alumni Program:** What first drew you to McNees, and what made it the right place to begin your legal career?

● **Randy Houston:** I'm a Penn Stater. I went to Penn State for undergrad, and because of those ties, central Pennsylvania was attractive to me. I didn't really know Harrisburg, but when I saw McNees on the on-campus interview list, I thought it checked a lot of boxes. It was close to Penn State, it was in a growing market, and it felt like the right fit. What really sealed it for me was the interview process. An associate, Mike Jarman, interviewed me on campus, and I remember thinking he didn't like me at all. Then, as I was leaving, he asked what I thought was going to happen in the Penn State-Michigan game that weekend. My whole attitude changed in that moment. I thought, "Oh, he does like me." By the time I left that room, I was all



in. Once I came up to Harrisburg and interviewed in the office, I knew that was where I wanted to start my career.

● **MAP:** Your career has crossed intellectual property, entertainment, sports, digital media, technology, and the performing arts. What has connected those industries for you?

● **RH:** For me, it has always been driven by the work and not by the industry. When I decided to go to law school, I knew I wanted to be an entertainment lawyer, and intellectual property law was my path into that world. Over time, I realized that if I stayed grounded in my skill set, IP, litigation, labor and employment, transactions, I could apply those skills in a lot of different places. That's really how my career unfolded. I didn't chase industries as much as I followed opportunities where those skills were useful. Whether it was sports, digital media, or dance, I knew I could adapt to the industry if the work was the right fit.

● **MAP:** You've worked in private practice, in-house legal departments, and creative organizations. How did those different environments shape the kind of lawyer you became?

● **RH:** Each environment teaches you something different. In private practice, especially when I had my own firm, I learned how to build a practice and how to rely on my own judgment. In-house work taught me how much company culture matters. Every organization has its own way of operating, and part of your job is figuring out how your skills fit within that culture. That's been one of the biggest adjustments in each role: learning how the company works, how people communicate, and what the legal function is expected to be. The legal issues may be familiar, but the context changes. Learning to navigate that has been a huge part of my growth.

● **MAP:** Across the many industries you've worked in, what skills or qualities have proven to be the most transferable?

● **RH:** The biggest thing is having a strong core skill set and being willing to apply it in new ways. My wheelhouse has always been intellectual property, litigation, and labor and employment. Those skills travel well. The laws may be the same, but how you use them depends on the company, the culture, and the people. I also think adaptability is essential. If you get too locked into one idea of what your career is supposed to look like, you can miss opportunities. I've always benefited from being open to where those skills could take me.

● **MAP:** As someone who, in addition to being an attorney, is also a musician, composer, writer, and performer, how has your creative background influenced the way you approach legal work?

● **RH:** It has influenced everything. At AILEY especially, this is the first job where I feel like I don't have to take off my creative hat when I walk into work and put on only my legal hat. I get to wear both at the same time, because the legal issues arise in



a deeply creative environment. That matters because I'm often working with people whose language is creative, not legal. I've always wanted clients and colleagues in those industries to know that I speak their language. They don't have to simplify the creative side for me, and I don't have to oversimplify the legal side for them. We can actually meet in the middle.

● **MAP: What do people often misunderstand about the relationship between law and creative work?**

● **RH:** I think people often assume lawyers are purely analytical and creatives are something completely different. But that divide is overstated. A lot of people assume lawyers won't understand the creative process or won't know how to talk to creative people. I've always tried to show that those worlds are not mutually exclusive. For me, that connection is one of the most rewarding parts of the work. Creative people often have unique legal issues that need to be solved in a way that respects how they work and think. Having a creative background helps me understand that context.

● **MAP: How has your Penn State involvement influenced your professional life?**

● **RH:** Tremendously. My Penn State leadership experience has shaped my professional life in a lot of ways, especially through nonprofit governance and board service. It gave me experience with leadership, strategy, and institutional decision-making that has been directly relevant to my legal career. I think it was also instrumental in helping me land my current role. When I interviewed for this job, my Penn State leadership and nonprofit experience mattered. It showed that I understood not just legal issues, but also governance, mission, and leadership in a broader sense.

● **MAP: For young lawyers interested in careers that cross law, business, media, and the arts, what advice would you give them?**

● **RH:** Don't pigeonhole yourself too early. It's good to have interests and goals, but some of the most valuable things you learn early in your career may come from work you didn't initially think you wanted to do. Build strong skills first. Let your interests evolve as your experience grows. And ask questions. Looking back, I think almost every answer I needed was somewhere in that building at McNeese. There were people with wisdom all around me, even when I didn't realize it at the time. The answers are there, but you also have to go out and find them.