Anyone dropping by David C. Freinberg’s office at the Newark law firm LeClairRyan has to notice the CEO-in-waiting’s neat desk, with a few carefully placed documents.

Freinberg, just tapped to succeed founder Gary LeClair as CEO in two years, said he’s always been an orderly person. “Growing up, I was the youngest of three boys, and my room was always the one that was in order, with the bed made up with hospital corners each morning before I left for school.”

But it takes more than a neat desk to make it as a law firm CEO.

“David understands client service, and he has a high degree of business acumen, exhibits leadership ability and shares the firm’s long-term values,” LeClair said. “The committee that put his name forward said David was the kind of steady guide who can continue to move the firm ahead.”

Freinberg said it was in his undergraduate years, studying history at Columbia University, “where I developed research, writing and advocacy skills.” He completed an accelerated graduate program in 1982, receiving a master’s degree in business from Columbia and a J.D. from the Benjamin Cardozo School of Law.
“I liked business and I liked transactional law,” Freinberg said — mergers and acquisitions, real estate
development, and investment and other activities that play a critical role in commerce.

“When I graduated, I had some discussions with investment banking firms,” Freinberg said. “But I thought that if I
started in law and then changed my mind, it would be easier to move into a [Wall Street or other] job, instead of
starting in business and then trying to get into law at a later date.”

Unlike many lawyers who advance in their profession by moving around, Freinberg found abundant opportunity by
staying in one place.

“Allowing for name changes and some mergers and acquisitions, I’ve basically been with the same law firm since
I graduated law school,” he said. “There was no reason to leave.”

Today, it’s tougher than ever to get that first job, and Freinberg said new grads have to build up a network of
contacts that can mentor them during law school, and can help them identify job opportunities after they graduate.

“You always had to network, of course,” he said. “But today, more lawyers are chasing fewer jobs, so you have to
pick up your pace at an earlier stage.”

LeClairRyan is doing some hiring, but on a very selective basis, taking on people who fit its plans to expand into
new geographic and business markets, LeClair said.

“We’re engaging in some strategic lateral hires if they have a book of business,” LeClair said, referring to
experienced lawyers who can bring clients with them when they move to a new firm.

Figuring out ways to keep growing the entire firm will be one of the many challenges facing Freinberg when he
becomes CEO. And he’ll have to give up some of his favorite work: handling transactional matters.

“Taking on the CEO position will mean less involvement with day-to-day matters and more administrative
responsibilities,” Freinberg said. “But at the same time, I’ll be able to put more of my organizational and prioritizing
skills to use. I’ve always tried to collaborate with others, and a firm this size offers plenty of opportunities to do
that.”

LeClairRyan has 300 attorneys in offices across the United States. As part of the transition to CEO, Freinberg was
just promoted from practice leader of the 75-employee New Jersey practice to firm-wide chief practice leader.

When Freinberg joined the firm, it was known as Robinson Wayne Greenberg, and by 1990, the name was
Robinson, St. John & Wayne. The really big change came in December 2007, when the then 45-attorney firm —
called Seiden Wayne — merged with Richmond, Va.-based LeClairRyan, which had about 170 attorneys, taking
on the larger firm’s name.

The merger brought Freinberg a promotion to LeClairRyan’s Newark office leader, and an appointment to the
firm’s executive committee, which functions like a board of directors, weighing in on compensation, hiring and
other decisions.
“Both firms had the same basic culture,” he said. “I saw the merger as an opening for more opportunities.”

Freinberg, characteristically, is modest on his advancement.

“Of course I’m excited about this opportunity,” he said. “But it’s still about collaboration. I’m just taking a larger role in the firm’s leadership and have more responsibility for executing the firm’s strategy.”