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**Movie Review "The Firm (1993)", Director:
Sydney Pollack, Written by: David Rabe,
Robert Towne, David Rayfiel, Daniel Pyne.
Production: Paramount Pictures**

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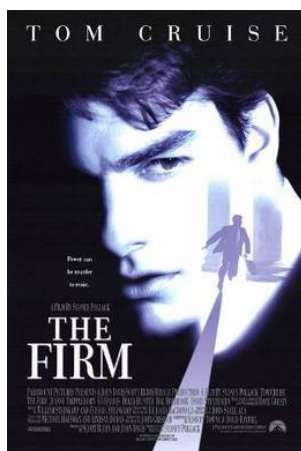
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ABSTRACT. The Firm is a 1993 American legal thriller film directed by Sydney Pollack and starring Tom Cruise, Jeanne Tripplehorn, Gene

Hackman, Ed Harris, Holly Hunter, Hal Holbrook, and David Strathairn. The film is based on the 1991 novel *The Firm* by author John Grisham. A young lawyer joins a small but prestigious law firm only to find out that most of their clients are on the wrong side of the law. The company is helping to launder mob money, get clients off charges and even murder partners who threaten to blow their cover, but when the FBI come calling to gather evidence on the lawyer's colleagues, he is caught between a rock and a hard place, juggling his life and his liberty.

KEYWORDS. *Movie Review, The Firm, Liberty, Justice*

I. MOVIE PROFILE



Release date	: June 30, 1993 (USA); May 31, 1993 (Theaters) and in May 22, 2000 (DVD)
Director	: Sydney Pollack
Story by	: John Grisham
Genre	: Drama, Mystery & Suspense
Written By	: David Rabe , Robert Towne, David Rayfiel , Daniel Pyne
Runtime	: 154 minutes
Studio	: Paramount Pictures

II. INTRODUCTION

The Firm is a 1993 American legal thriller film directed by Sydney Pollack

and starring Tom Cruise, Jeanne Tripplehorn, Gene Hackman, Ed Harris, Holly Hunter, Hal Holbrook, and David Strathairn. The film is based on the 1991 novel *The Firm* by author John Grisham.

A young lawyer joins a small but prestigious law firm only to find out that most of their clients are on the wrong side of the law. The company is helping to launder mob money, get clients off charges and even murder partners who threaten to blow their cover, but when the FBI come calling to gather evidence on the lawyer's colleagues, he is caught between a rock and a hard place, juggling his life and his liberty.

III. MOVIE RESUME

Mitch McDeere is a young man from an impoverished background, but with a promising future in law. About to graduate from Harvard Law School near the top of his class, interviews for an associate position at various prestigious law firms, and during his first few months as a lawyer.

Interviewer I

"Mr. McDeere, we offered you \$ 68,000 a year, arguably the leading law firms in Chicago. Are you in a hurry? "

Mc. Deer

"Yes, sir. I have a job. Only during the lunch break. "

Interviewer II

"I know you have many offers. Did you know, for example, that we have around 127 clients, which has 500 company? All right, we will offer \$ 74,000 ... Terms billing join us for the first year is 2,000 hours, not 25 or 26 or 2,700. We want to have a life outside the office, Mitch. And if you're a Lakers fan, we have a special place in the future. "

Interviewer III

"I know there are many firms from across the region who came here offers you everything. But with your ability and ambition, there is only one place for you, by our firm in Washington ... "

Interviewer IV

"One of our partners is a former governor, two congressmen and a former Senator of Agriculture."

Finally he receives a generous job offer from Bendini, Lambert & Locke, a small, boutique firm in Memphis specializing in accounting and tax law.

Throughout the movie, Mitch is faced with many personal ethical issues, such as balancing work-life demands and drinking on the job, as well as business ethical issues. Each decision Mitch makes, is evaluated and acted upon from a different stage of moral development, according to Kohlberg's theory and other ethical frameworks.

The Firm portrayed the business environment in a very negative light. The first few scenes show the different law firms offering more money than other firms to entice Mitch to accept their offer of employment. Each deal included more and more benefits, perquisites, and additional money and bonuses. This cast the business environment as a cut-throat competitive and money driven realm of society. Later in the film, after Mitch accepted an associate lawyer position with Bendini, Lambert, & Locke (the law firm), the business environment is further portrayed as corrupt and deceitful. As part of Mitch's employment offer, he is given a fully furnished home. He and his wife, Abby, move to Memphis and Mitch sets to work studying to pass the Tennessee bar exam. Avery Tolar, one of the firm's senior partners, becomes his mentor and begins introducing Mitch to BL&L's professional culture, which demands complete loyalty,

strict confidentiality, and a willingness to charge exceptional fees for their services. Seduced by the money and perks showered on him, including a house and car, he is at first totally oblivious to the more sinister side of his new employer, although Abby has her suspicions.

However, the firm wire-tapped and bugged the home to monitor Mitch's personal life, to ensure he and his wife, Abbey, would always act in the firm's best interests. Mitch passes the bar exam and begins working long hours that put a strain on his marriage. Working closely with Avery, Mitch learns that most of the Firm's work involves helping wealthy clients hide large amounts of money in off-shore shell corporations and other dubious tax-avoidance schemes. While on a trip to the Cayman Islands on behalf of a client, Mitch is seduced by a local woman and cheats on Abby.

Unbeknownst to Mitch, this encounter is a set-up and their tryst on the beach is photographed by people working for the firm's sinister security chief, Bill DeVasher, who later uses these photographs as blackmail to keep Mitch quiet about what he knows. Finally, it is revealed that only 30% of the firm's clients are real people, some of the "companies" the firm invests in do not actually exist, and much of the profit the firm received is from money laundering, drug smuggling, and its ties to the Chicago Mob. These ties to the Mob also resulted in the deaths of four attorneys who all attempted to "blow the whistle" on the firm. Mitch realizes he is now trapped, but after two associates of the firm die under mysterious circumstances. These are all well-kept secrets from those outside the firm and new associates. After the firm is able to gain an associate's trust or establish enough coercive power, they are told about the true operations and activities that keep Bendini, Lambert, & Locke in business. All these elements combined present business as a damaged industry.

Multiple business ethics issues were raised in *The Firm*. he is approached by FBI agents who inform him that while some of BL&L's business is legitimate, their biggest client is the Morolto Mafia family from Chicago. The firm's partners, as well as most of the associates, are all complicit in a massive tax fraud and money laundering scheme. The two associates who died learned about the firm's dark side, and were killed to keep them from talking. They warn Mitch that his house, car, and office have probably all been bugged. The FBI pressures Mitch to provide the Bureau with evidence they can use to go after the Moroltos and bring down BL&L.

Bendini, Lambert & Locke is a front for a conspiracy of delicious malevolence and, early on, anyway, quite persuasive complexity. Only its senior partners know its full scope. The firm has a policy of bringing aboard crackerjack young lawyers of Mitch's hungry background, and then overpaying and materially spoiling them to the point that when they find out the firm's true nature, they can't afford to quit.

There are only two ways for lawyers to exit Bendini, Lambert & Locke. They can stick around until they retire as thoroughly compromised, multi-millionaire senior partners, or they die before their time in mysterious circumstances.

Agen : "My name Voyles. Denton Voyles. I'm from the Department of Justice."

Mc. Deer : "What happened to Eddie Lomax?"

Agen : "We have been investigating Bendini, Lambert & Locke for four years. None lawyer who left your law firm alive. Two tried to leave, they were killed. Two were tried, you know what happened. Now, we are sure that your house bugged. Tapped cell phone, office bugged. Maybe they

follow you, they may be here in Washington as we speak.”

Mc. Deer : “Are you saying my life is threatened?”

Agen : “I said that Your life has over. Your firm law is the sole legitimate representative Morolto crime family in Chicago. Known as the Mafia.”

Mc. Deer : “I do not believe.”

Agen : “They set up legitimate businesses with dirty money from drugs, gambling, prostitution. All cash, comes from elsewhere. You believe. That's why you talk to Abanks Thomas in Cayman. That's why you need a private investigator to ask something that got him killed. Maybe 30% of their clients' legitimate. They enter a new person, gave him money to buy a car, house. After a few years, and your children to private school, you get used to the good life, they tell the truth.”

Mc. Deer : “You mean All associates at the firm ...”

Agen : “All the fellow out. We suspect most of the associates.”

Mc. Deer : “Why Are not you doing the indictment and catch everything? We should have people inside. We need to see a copy of the contract, the client bank notes,”

Mc. Deer : “Articles of Association.”

Mc. Deer : “Wait a minute. You think I ...”

Agen : “You can reject it. But we will destroy this firm. And when that happens, you will go to jail with the rest. It will happen, son, believe me.”

Mc. Deer : “Why I can not go?”

Agen : “ That's what Kozinski and Hodges are trying to do. You need to think about this offer. Meanwhile, you and your

wife have to behave as if everything was normal. Do not discuss this with anyone, but make a decision."

Mitch knows he faces a stark choice. If he works with the FBI, he believes that even if he stays alive, he will have to disclose information about the firm's legitimate clients thus breaking the attorney client privilege and risking disbarment. However, the FBI warns him that if he stays with the firm, he will almost certainly go to jail when the FBI takes down both the firm and the Moroltos. Either way, his life as he knows it is over. He agrees to cooperate with the FBI in return for \$1.5 million and the release of his brother, Ray, from prison in Arkansas .

Agent Firm : *"Hello, Mitch. My Bill DeVasher, Security Firm. Mr Locke and Mr Lambert told me about your little problem with the FBI. What can we talk for a minute. "*

Mc. Deer : *"Actually, I've said everything to them."*

Firm Agent : *"I know pretty much what you say to colleagues, so it seems I understand. Now it's my job to make you understand. What I worry about, son, is this. The FBI will not come toward you if they do not know will lead you. What do you think makes them think that? "*

Mc. Deer : *"I do not know."*

Firm Agent : *"Well, It's my job to investigate it. For example, they may know how important your wife for you. They may use it. How? Avery says last Friday you come home in the afternoon. He guessed you with another woman. "*

Mc. Deer : *"Why would Avery think ... How do you know?"*

Firm Agent : *"You were not followed? Photos Abby one day walking to the mailbox, waiting for her Redbook, catalog pictures. What even the discovery? She finds heartache, Mitch. Death of love and*

*trust. Imagine one day he opened it. Please. Let's see
Destroy. Not only intercourse, Mitch. But an intimate
relationship, oral and others, can be very heavy for believing wife
to forgive and impossible to forget. "*

Firm Agent : *"That's only part that can be used to force the FBI, Mitch.
So take care of yourself. I will do my best to protect you, and I
know you will do your best to protect the firm. So if the FBI to
pressure you, Tell me before it's too late, huh? Do not you,
Mitch? "*

From Mitch McDeere's perspective, he was pressured throughout to choose between cooperating with the FBI's investigation, acting in the best interests of the firm and mob, giving in to his wife and leaving the firm, breaking the confidentiality of the attorney-client privilege, and whistleblowing activities within the firm. From the law firm's perspective, the partners and associate attorneys knowingly operated unethically. They routinely altered financial documents, accepted money earned illegally, overcharged their clients for legal work, and worked with the Mob to cover up murders of any attorney that tried to leave the firm or report Bendini, Lambert, & Locke to the FBI. Despite the numerous business ethics issues in *The Firm*, the three major dilemmas are Mitch's decision whether he will help the FBI gather information about the firm, comply with the culture of the firm and the Mob, and if he will uphold his oath as an attorney.

Early in his career, Mitch was contacted by FBI agents who were currently investigating Bendini, Lambert, & Locke. They wanted Mitch's help with collecting documentation that would help the FBI's investigation and eventually close the firm and allow the federal government to arrest members of the Chicago Mob. Here, the agents used their coercive power

when they told Mitch he could either cooperate with them or eventually be arrested with the other attorneys. Mitch initially began copying files to help indict the firm on counts of money laundering, murder, and falsified financial documents.

However, once he understood the risks, such as losing his job, and danger of his wife's life being threatened, Mitch became much more hesitant to help the FBI. Initially, Mitch acted according to Kohlberg's fourth stage of development, thereby "obeying the public institutionalized law, and believing that everyone else is equally obligated to obey the law". The whistleblower laws state that one should engage in illegal business practices in order to acquire enough information for prosecution.

Therefore, he was acting in accordance with the law, and believed the firm was liable for the crimes they committed. However, after Mitch assessed the personal risk of reporting the firm, he acted according to Kohlberg's second stage of development. Mitch was concerned about losing his prestigious job, house, car, and lifestyle. After wavering throughout the course of the film, the issue was finally resolved when Mitch did not provide the FBI with the documents needed to prosecute Bendini, Lambert, & Locke for the charges the government were investigating. Instead, Mitch provided documents proving Bendini, Lambert, & Locke mailed invoices with inflated billable hours to clients, a lesser federal offense, but still punishable under the law. Utilitarianists would argue it is ethical to whistleblow and provide the documents to the FBI regarding all the offenses of the firm, which many would argue is the proper way to resolve this ethical issue.

Beginning with the interview process, there was a distinct culture within the firm. The employees appeared to be a close-knit unit with a high level of trust and respect for each other. Everyone who entered the firm

passed the bar exam, were compensated at very high levels, and never left the firm. However, what was not clear to Mitch initially is that those who tried to leave the firm were “mysteriously” murdered and the bodies were never recovered.

The Department of Justice finally informed Mitch that the firm finds bright law school graduates, entices them with everything he had already been given, coerces them into situations that can later be used as blackmail, bug their home, and wiretap their phone lines in an effort to gain their undying trust and loyalty (rooted in fear) before revealing the firm has strong links to the Chicago Mob and engages in a wide variety of illegal business practices. Mitch considers continuing along the typical path of associate attorneys and initially does so. His wife claims he is only doing it because he is trying to make up for his financially tough childhood and his desire to provide more for his wife and future children. Here, Mitch is following a strict act deontological line of thinking. He does not consider the rules or consequences for his actions. Rather, he is doing as he pleases and achieving his own goals and dreams. As previously mentioned, Mitch does not continue on with the firm. Instead, he uncovers falsified invoices to clients, which he turns over to the FBI.

Afterwards, he leaves the firm and moves out of the city to start his own small law firm on the east coast. Again, this issue should have been resolved with him reporting all the wrongdoings he was aware of to the FBI, thereby ceasing as much illegal activity as possible. Desperate to find a way out, Mitch inadvertently stumbles on a solution when one of his clients reveals that he was billed for an extra five hours. Mitch eventually discovers that while the firm is laundering money for the Moroltos, it has also been engaging in massive overbilling. By mailing these bills to their clients, they committed mail fraud, and did so at such a rate that it exposes

them to RICO charges. He begins secretly copying the firm's billing records.

However, he is unmasked when a prison guard on the Morolto's payroll alerts DeVasher. Evading DeVasher and his thugs, he finds the Morolto brothers and, offering himself as a loyal attorney looking out for his clients' best interests, leads them to believe that his contact with the FBI and copying files at the firm was merely an attempt to expose illegal overbilling. He asks the Moroltos to turn over their billing invoices in order to help the FBI make their case against the firm. He assures them that as long as he is alive, any other information he knows about their legal affairs is covered under attorney-client privilege and will never be revealed.

Mc. Deere : "I'm Mitch McDeere. I'm your lawyer. One of them. I assume you know, but I thought I'd mention it, whenever."

Firm Man: "Do you want to sit?"

Mc. Deere : "Not really."

Mc. Deere : "I want to try and ... This is just ... this is very awkward. I am afraid my firm has to be unethical. It seems that we, Bendini, Lambert & Locke, the entire firm, has been engaged in a ... well, a conspiracy. We've Charging more of our clients. In some cases, larger Charging. I'm sure, I do not know all that happened when I join the Firm. Well, I feel I have to report this criminal act. But I can not use ..."

Mc. Deere : "I can not use your invoices without your written permission."

Firm Man: "Our invoices?"

Mc. Deere : "Yes, sir. Your bill. You see, this is an important part of the evidence that we have charge over you."

Firm Man: "That's it?"

Mc. Deere : "Less is more."

Mc. Deere : "Well, most of our clients have agreed, almost all. Except for you. That's why I came here."

Firm Man: "And is this what you've been talking to the FBI? You want us to let you change our bill ..."

Mc. Deere : "What do we impose on you, I can say, charge more to you."

Firm Man: "... All the government."

Mc. Deere : "Yes, sir."

Firm Man: "Now, does it in any way ..."

Mc. Deere : "No, sir."

Mc. Deere : "Not in any way relinquish your rights with full confidentiality and complete outside attorney-client relationship. I'm your lawyer, gentlemen. Do I like it or not, I can not talk to the government about you even when I am no longer so your lawyer."

Mc. Deere : "It would break my word, my oath."

Firm Man: "All right, Mitch. So what files are stolen? All this is about?"

Mc. Deere : "The file has not been stolen. It is in the exact same spot. I felt it was important for me to know the details of manufacture and the presence of all the possessions and your activities. So I prepared copies of everything. That way you and I can communicate perfectly, and, of course, if we have to talk to a third party, then I know everything, right down to the pound, penny, franc and deutsche mark."

Mc. Deere : "I have to know everything you know. As it should be, as your lawyer."

Firm Man: "And what if the Firm Intends end the occupation?"

Mc. Deere : "Whatever I know, wherever I go, I bound by attorney-client privilege."

Mc. Deere : "I'm almost like ... You could say I am exactly like a ship carrying cargo that will never reach the port. And as long as I am alive, that ship will always be at sea, as it was."

Firm Man: "As Yasir Arafat, huh? Never spend the night in the same place."

Mc. Deere : "In any case, I need your written authorization, so I can give you the bill, as it has been given to another client."

Firm Man: "You have a letter of attorney?"

Mc. Deere : "Yes."

Understanding the deal he is offering them, the Moroltos agree to guarantee Mitch's safety and let him give the FBI all the evidence they need to destroy the firm. Since the attorney-client privilege doesn't apply when a lawyer knows about ongoing criminal activity, Mitch is able to keep his status as a lawyer.

Mc. Deere : "Oh, yes, I won. I won my life back. You did not tell me what to do and they did not tell me what to do. "

FBI Agent : "You want to know something weird?"

Mc. Deere : "I found the law again. You actually made me think about it. I made it through three years of law school without doing that. "

FBI Agent : "Why not?"

Mc. Deere : "It's against the law."

FBI Agent : "OK."

The film ends as the McDeeres leave their house in Memphis and return to Boston, driving the same car in which they arrived.

Mc. Deer : "Did I lose you?"

Abby : "You look tired."

Mc. Deer : "Really?"

Abby : "I've loved you all my life. Even before we met. The rest is not even you, just as you promised. But lately, you hold your promise. How can you miss me? "

Mc. Deer : "You think it would be?"

Abby : "It could go?"

Mc. Deer : "Boston."

Abby : "What's in Boston?"

Mc. Deer : "We."

IV. LEGAL & MORAL ISSUE IN THE MOVIE

Once Mitch passes the Bar exam, he takes an oath to uphold his position with the highest of standards and maintain the confidentiality of the attorney-client privileges. Nearly immediately after accepting the position as associate attorney he is asked to break confidentiality. Since the firm works for the Chicago Mob he is required by his oath to not disclose any information shared with him outside a court of law by the Mob. However, he does so with his brother, wife, his "whistleblower assistant", as well as other characters in the film. None of these instances led to the firm ceasing their illegal business with the Mob or other inappropriate and unethical behaviors.

Therefore, by Mitch sharing this information with others and breaking the oath, demonstrates he acted "impartially to those affected by his decision". This is noted by Kohlberg's sixth stage of moral development. Mitch broke the oath but did so through his own self-chosen principles. This decision should have been resolved by not sharing

information about the Chicago Mob to anyone unless they were directly involved in reporting the crime to the federal government. This thinking is in alignment with an utilitarian point of view as well as Kohlberg's fourth stage of moral development, where what is ethical is dictated through law.

On the positive side: Mitch is honorable in his efforts to solve his problem in a way that doesn't betray his oath as an attorney. And Mitch and Abby, despite some rough spots in their marriage, are so devoted that both risk their lives while attempting to help or protect each other.

V. CONCLUSION

Overall, this activity helped to understand Kohlberg's stages and other ethical frameworks in a practical setting. It clearly demonstrated the processes of ethical decision making and how a person arrives at their decision. It also highlighted how this can change depending on circumstances. Also, this activity, through *The Firm*, demonstrated how toxic power and authority can be to individuals, groups, and society. Bendini, Lambert, & Locke intentionally coerced new employees to gain their loyalty and continued devotion to the firm. They did so hoping the individuals would not report them to investigators and the government. These acts of exploitation only furthered the harm to the general public.

The Chicago Mob was empowered in their drug dealing and money laundering; Bendini, Lambert, & Locke continued to offshore money and corrupt young lawyers; some of the best and brightest graduating lawyers were forced into a lifestyle of unethical, immoral, and illegal acts. These actions would only serve to do greater harm in the future if they were not reported and ceased. Through this activity, it is even more apparent how important and dangerous whistleblowing can be. The average citizen may

believe crime happens on the streets. This film communicated that wrongdoing is everywhere. The film ends as the McDeeres leave their house in Memphis and return to Boston, driving the same car in which they arrived.

On the positive side: Mitch is honorable in his efforts to solve his problem in a way that doesn't betray his oath as an attorney. And Mitch and Abby, despite some rough spots in their marriage, are so devoted that both risk their lives while attempting to help or protect each other.

VI. REFERENCES

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