



Portfolio Media, Inc. | 860 Broadway, 6th Floor | New York, NY 10003 | www.law360.com
Phone: +1 646 783 7100 | Fax: +1 646 783 7161 | customerservice@law360.com

Rainmaker Q&A: Bird Marella's Mitchell Kamin

Law360, New York (August 15, 2013, 9:18 AM ET) -- Trial attorney Mitchell A. Kamin is a partner with Los Angeles-based litigation firm Bird Marella Boxer Wolpert Nessim Dooks & Lincenberg PC. He handles complex civil and white collar criminal cases, and has litigated and counseled companies in areas including entertainment, gaming, copyright, contract disputes, securities and the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.

Prior to joining the firm, Kamin served as president & CEO of Bet Tzedek Legal Services, one of the largest nonprofit law firms in the United States. At Bet Tzedek, he led a 70-person full-time staff and was responsible for major policy initiatives and overseeing significant litigation, in both trial and appellate courts. He also spearheaded the largest pro bono initiative in U.S. history, garnering multiple national awards including the ABA Pro Bono Publico Award.

Kamin has served as an adjunct professor at Loyola Law School and the Daily Journal repeatedly has selected him as one of the Top 100 Lawyers in California. He recently served as chairman of the board of commissioners for the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA), which provides public housing and rental assistance programs for thousands of low-income families with an annual operating budget of more than \$1 billion.

Q: How did you become a rainmaker?

A: The starting premise is staying in front of clients and making sure you're providing them with excellent legal services. I returned to private practice from a setting in which I had developed very strong relationships with people in a position to hire lawyers or refer cases, but I hadn't actually been "practicing law" for about eight years. Once I decided to return to private practice, I worked to convert those relationships from the prior context into one where people could imagine using me as their lawyer or entrusting me with referrals. I did this by spending a lot of face-to-face time with people, sharing meals and talking about the kind of work that I was planning to do and what I could offer them as an attorney. Fortunately, the relationships were strong enough that people were willing to give me a shot.

Once you have your foot in the door and deliver great work, you can expect more opportunities to arise with those same clients, provided you do a great job, are responsive and available, and remain directly engaged with clients instead of simply delegating work to junior associates. When you deliver on the work, the clients will come back for more.

Q: How do you stay a rainmaker?

A: Once again, it comes down understanding what your clients need, both with respect to your engagement as their lawyer and also the areas that are important or of interest to them, as well as staying on the cutting edge so you can meet those needs.

For example, with my gaming clients, I want to make sure they know I'm always thinking about new laws and creative ways to advance their causes. I want them to be assured that I'm available to them to brainstorm on issues and developments within their industry, and that they're not going to get a bill if they simply call to talk through a one-off issue. This helps establish a strong relationship, and when a time comes in which they need litigation counsel, they think of me as a trusted adviser who knows their business and understands which areas of the law affect them.

As a general business litigator, I take care to market myself to clients to whom I can offer an array of services, no matter what their problem may be. There are also a few areas, like gaming, FCPA and intellectual property, where I have a personal interest in being out there in the community at large — beyond just the legal community and my current client base — in order to make a name for myself as someone knowledgeable about those areas. This is where the traditional business development stuff (speaking, writing) can pay real dividends.

Q: What advice would you give to an aspiring rainmaker?

A: I would think about developing a practice on multiple levels. I personally received very helpful advice at one point, which was that being a rainmaker really boils down to one thing: being a great lawyer. And, frankly, being a little bit older helps! After a while, you start to build relationships with people whom you've met through your kids' schools, through nonprofit boards that you sit on, or with people you've met at your place of worship. There is no shortcut, and part of it just comes with experience and age, but it's important to remember that successful attorneys often have client relationships that began in other, nonlegal settings.

I also think the power of asking directly for the opportunity to help clients is highly underrated. Younger lawyers would do well to make a concerted effort to get to know people, especially family friends or people they've grown up with who've gone into business; people with whom there is already an established connection. Once you have that connection, it never hurts to ask for a shot. By the same token, seize every opportunity to ask prospective clients and referral sources what they look for in outside counsel — you will learn a lot whether or not it turns into a case right away. Don't be shy!

Another helpful strategy is to seize every opportunity that presents itself, whether it's to make a pitch, give a speech, deliver an MCLE program or write an article. All of those little things add up in a big way. These opportunities, coupled with really developing both personal and professional relationships, can be very helpful.

Finally, I think it's absolutely vital to consider the people you work with and the skills and expertise they bring to the table. I'm lucky to work in a litigation boutique with an amazing and diverse group of lawyers, so whenever I have a chance to talk to prospective clients, whether informally or in a pitch, I always make sure they know what we can offer them as a firm. At the end of the day, we all rise and fall together, and while there are certainly benefits to being the rainmaker, I strongly prefer to be a member of a firm with many rainmakers who help each other grow and improve as a team.

Q: Tell us a tale of landing a big client.

A: When I returned to private practice in 2010, I was looking through my law school class yearbook and I came across the name of a classmate I really liked, but hadn't spoken to since graduation. I learned that he had become general counsel of a company that I had an interest in, and in an industry that I was interested in, but in another state. Still, I called him up just to say hello and to let him know that I was in private practice, and it just so happened that he was going to be in Los Angeles the following week. We agreed to meet for lunch.

During our meeting, he said that he had been asked to deliver a major presentation to a group of other general counsel in his industry and asked me if I would help him prepare. Even though it was a significant time investment, I happily agreed, and the presentation was a huge success. Shortly after, he hired me for my first project, and his company — an S&P 500 company — has now become a major client of mine. All from a yearbook! It just goes to show the importance of maintaining strong personal relationships.

The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the firm, its clients, or Portfolio Media Inc., or any of its or their respective affiliates. This article is for general information purposes and is not intended to be and should not be taken as legal advice.