

IT'S ALL ABOUT REPUTATION

AS AN ATTORNEY, IT'S EXPECTED THAT YOU'LL HAVE TO ARGUE YOUR POINT, SAYS **KEVIN SULLIVAN**, CEO OF WINSTEAD PC — BUT DON'T BE A JERK ABOUT IT

Kevin Sullivan dreamed of being an astronaut when he was a child. As a teenager, he rounded up shopping carts for Medallion, and then after undergrad he worked as a traveling salesman selling Vicks cough drops to pharmacies in Iowa. He eventually went to law school and landed at Winstead PC, where he has been for 29 years. Sullivan is from Dallas and grew up in the Lake Highlands area, attending school there before heading off to UNT to major in finance. "I went north on 35 to Denton for undergrad, and then south on 35 to UT for law school," Sullivan said. "I didn't decide to go to law school until after I was already in college; I wanted to use my degree, but in a different way than just working for a business." He seems to have achieved that goal, as he now is the CEO and chairman of Winstead PC, which specializes in real estate, finance and banking law.

AGE: 53

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT WINSTEAD PC? That we are exactly the right size. I got the job as CEO and chairman in January, and one of the reasons I wanted it was because I felt we had just the right opportunity right now. We are big enough to offer a wide range of expertise, but regional as opposed to national or global so we can continue to be really competitive on rates. Being this size also allows us to be nimble and provide a customized approach for our clients.

DESCRIBE A LEARNING EXPERIENCE FROM EARLY IN YOUR CAREER? One thing I learned is that despite the fact that Dallas is a gigantic city, you make a reputation for yourself really quickly. It made me realize how important that reputation is. It doesn't take long to form a reputation, but it takes a long time to change it. Young attorneys make their reputations only three or four years in, but by being responsive and honest and by being nice they developed a good reputation really fast, not only among real estate lawyers, but also among business people in the real estate community.

HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT DEVELOPING YOUR REPUTATION? You work hard, you are responsive, you are careful, obviously, but you are also honest and straightforward — just don't be a jerk. A lot of the time, being a lawyer you are necessarily adversarial, and so by definition you are going to be arguing a point or taking a position contrary to someone on the other side. But 99 percent of the time you can do it without being a jerk or going into the gutter.

WHAT DO YOU TELL YOUR EMPLOYEES TO LEAD AND INSPIRE THEM? More than anything else we try and support them. Most of the people we hire don't need a ton of inspiration — they want to do well. What we try to do is support their natural ambition and provide them everything possible from adequate staffing and a collaborative environment, to avoiding a politically charged kind of atmosphere, and developing a place that someone would want to work throughout their career.

WHAT WOULD SURPRISE PEOPLE ABOUT YOU? I enjoy going to Cowboys games, and I go to most of their home games. I also really enjoy reading; my favorite books are the Robert Caro series on LBJ. I also skydived once — it was a youthful indiscretion.

WHAT KEEPS YOU AWAKE AT NIGHT? I sleep pretty well, honestly. What occasionally keeps me awake are things that are totally out of my control, like the national economy. We've had a lot of tough times over the past couple of years, and those affect law firms. For instance, we do a lot of transactional work, so in 2008 we were negatively impacted by the freeze-up of the capital markets. Fortunately, we've seen that substantially come back in the past few years, especially this year.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOUR COMPANY IN FIVE YEARS? Our goal is to be the best super-regional firm that we can be. We aren't thinking at all national or global at this point. Texas is clearly the best state to be in. We need to take full advantage of our position. After all, high expertise attorneys at a lower rate is a message that is very easy to sell.



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