

Rainmaker Q&A: Goodwin Procter's Ilan S. Nissan

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Ilan S. Nissan is a senior partner in Goodwin Procter LLP's private equity and mergers and acquisitions practice. He has extensive experience advising private equity funds, venture capital funds, hedge funds and alternative asset managers and their portfolio companies in a wide array of transactions, adversarial matters and other strategic matters.



Ilan S. Nissan

In addition to his work with clients, Nissan sits on the firm's Executive Committee and leads the practice in New York, as well as serves as a lecturer-in-law at Columbia University Law School for 15 years, where he teaches an upper-level course focusing on mergers and acquisitions, private equity, venture capital and legal transactional strategies. Nissan is originally from Ramat Gan, Israel and speaks three languages, including Hebrew, Arabic and French. He is married with three daughters (and a friendly Shih-Tzu) and is an avid hockey fan.

Nissan is regularly recognized as a leading lawyer in his fields of expertise by Legal 500 U.S., Super Lawyers, International Financial Law Review and Best Lawyers.

Q: What skill was most important for you in becoming a rainmaker?

A: I am not fond of the word "rainmaker" and prefer to view my business development style as an ability to connect people to people and people to solutions. I find that many law firms have the skills to solve client problems, but few are able to deliver advice in a way that a client can best utilize it. I think having the ability to know your firm's offerings, being sensitive to a client's unique institutional risk tolerance and culture, and consolidating and delivering advice in a way that can best be consumed by the client is the way to advance their interests.

I seek to utilize this approach in my main practice areas, as well as other areas that are critically important to clients. Ultimately over time, this focus on the client and customizing the advice dispensed leads to loyalty and repeat assignments.

Q: How do you prepare a pitch for a potential new client?

A: I typically do not "pitch" clients in the traditional sense. Instead, the way I try to bring in new business is by connecting people with the right parties and opportunities, as well as trying to be the "go-to" person when clients have significant issues that arise. And if there are better solutions in the market, I think it is important to be honest with regard to whether or not you have the expertise to best handle

any particular piece of work. My job is to listen carefully and try to help clients solve problems or overcome obstacles, legal or otherwise.

Q: Share an example of a time when landing a client was especially difficult, and how you handled it.

A: Landing a new client can be difficult, but the real challenge lies in having the right team in place to make that client succeed. Richard Branson has said that if you look after your employees, they will look after clients. At Goodwin, our people come first and we take pride in training our attorneys and staff to provide outstanding client service. In addition, it is important to find the right combination of personalities and work styles in sustaining any long-term relationship. That means there is much focus on analyzing the client's style and risk preferences in choosing the right legal team on any assignment.

Q: What should aspiring rainmakers focus on when beginning their law careers?

A: Young lawyers need to think about engaging in activities that add value or deepen relationships in order to stay top-of-mind and relevant. They should cast a wide net by building connections with law school classmates, client colleagues and mentors, as you never know where a relationship may lead. Bringing in new clients doesn't happen overnight. It is part of your suite of skills as a lawyer who listens and considers every matter important.

Q: What's the most challenging aspect of remaining a rainmaker?

A: One of the more challenging aspects of building a business is remaining on top of the market in which our clients compete and how our clients themselves evolve. Clients are always changing in many ways and I think it is critical to always stay close to them and their thinking. And as they change, in order to continue to add the best possible value, you need to adjust the manner in which you interact with them and address their needs.

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