

## Rainmaker Q&A: Andrews Kurth's Kathleen Wu

*Law360, New York (September 04, 2013, 11:27 AM ET)* -- Kathleen J. Wu is a partner in Andrews Kurth LLP's Dallas office. Her practice areas include real estate, finance and business transactions. Wu's reputation for creative thinking and her ability to calmly and strategically facilitate the "end game" has not only helped her establish a healthy legal practice, but it has also led to many leadership roles within the firm. She is also a frequent writer and speaker on issues affecting women and other under-represented groups in the legal profession and was recently appointed as chairwoman of the United States Tennis Association's National Committee on Diversity and Inclusion. Through this position, Wu has expanded her horizons to tackle the issue of diversity in sports as well as in the workplace. Her ability to serve as an instigator of change has earned her many recognitions, including being named one of only 30 "Extraordinary Women in Texas Law" by Texas Lawyer newspaper and to the "Most Powerful and Influential Women in Texas" list by Texas Diversity magazine.

### **Q: How did you become a rainmaker?**

A: When I arrived in Dallas in 1987, the real estate finance market was in the tank and the savings and loan industry in Dallas was in turmoil. As a real estate lawyer, therefore, fear was my biggest motivator. Fear of failure, fear of disappointing the partner I worked for, fear of being laughed out of my chosen profession, you name it. Sheer terror made me hole up in my office, work late, come in early, and generally do work that was bulletproof. It made me work so hard that the only possible outcome was that I turned into a pretty good lawyer — the kind that partners felt they could turn to when they had an important assignment. And, when you're an associate, that's the first phase of rainmaking: becoming the young lawyer that partners feel good about assigning their most important client's work to. Not only does that get you billable work from within your firm — which, in turn, allows you to develop your skills as a lawyer — but it's the foundation that you build your later business developments on.

Ultimately, that hard, fear-based work I had done all those years really paid off, particularly when the market began to turn around. Eventually, newly formed banks were created and they acquired the assets of the failed savings and loans. I had represented a client against one of these new banks and at the time I had thought it was a highly adversarial deal, and I assumed that the bankers on the other side weren't my biggest fans, to say the least. However, as it turns out, one of those bankers recommended me to a new prospective borrower who was looking to buy assets from the new bank (as he didn't have counsel at the time for this kind of product). That client turned out to be a very wealthy foreign investor and, to this day, he is one of my clients. We have helped him amass a small fortune in real estate holdings throughout the country and even internationally.

**Q: How do you stay a rainmaker?**

A: I continue to try to be invaluable to my clients. One of the ways I do that is, for almost every client, on almost every deal, I “shadow” what is going on with their deal even if there is another lawyer at the firm who is the assigned “first chair.” I don’t charge my time for this and it means I incur a lot of unbilled time. But, at the end of the day, I consider working for my clients to be a privilege, and I won’t take them for granted. If that means I need to stay involved behind the scenes for anything from simple oversight to express strategy, I do it.

This has required me to become fluid in many substantive areas that are out of my traditional fairway, but that has paid off. So not only do I spend a lot of time across different industries and across the spectrum of real estate and finance transactions, it also means I invest a lot of time in unrelated disciplines, like litigation and bankruptcy, to ensure I’m adding value on everything I shadow. Most often, clients are unaware of this additional role I’m playing, and that’s fine with me as long as we’re executing and providing the value they expect and need. I have zero pride in authorship.

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

A: Think like an owner, even when you’re technically not one. That means looking at every assignment holistically, and not just focusing on your tiny piece of it. Anticipate what the next step is and either get to work on it or, at the very least, tee it up. From a firm standpoint, ask yourself what a partner would do in a given case. Partners have their eye on the “big picture,” so before you answer an email, return a phone call, or handle a task, ask yourself if you’re handling this in a way that benefits and adds value to the client.

Also, don’t feel like your volunteer work has to be legal-oriented. I spend a lot of time talking, writing and working on nonlegal issues (specifically issues affecting women in the legal profession and on behalf of the United States Tennis Association), and I have found that the “cross-pollination” has been incredibly valuable, both as a business generation tool and as a way to improve my skills as a lawyer. So if your after-hours passion is art or nature, or whatever, don’t feel like you have to abandon it because you need to focus all your energies on being a lawyer. You can learn much from your nonlegal pursuits.

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

A: My most memorable tale of landing a client came about after some very tense negotiations on behalf of another, long-standing client. The deal was heated and there were times when voices were raised and tempers were almost lost. I’m tough to anger, though, so I always kept my cool — at least in comparison to some others in the room. There was one provision in the contract that kept coming up again and again, and neither side would budge on it. It was a deal-breaker for both sides, and it was beginning to look like the whole transaction — which had taken months to pull together at this point — would fall apart.

Fortunately, we were able to craft a resolution that made both sides, if not totally happy, then happy enough, and we closed the deal. A few weeks later, I got a call from an executive at the company that was on the other side of the deal and she said that her boss was impressed by my work and wanted to talk to me about doing some work for them. A few dinners later, I was their lawyer. I later learned that the head of the company is known for keeping his cool and that’s what he looks for in a lawyer. Apparently I passed the test.

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