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We are NM – High Potentials: Abe Kanno

[Abe Kanno](#) is in the firm's Atlanta office and focuses his practice on commercial and real estate transactions. He regularly represents real estate developers, investors, and hotel operators as it relates to the purchase and sale of real estate, title and survey analysis, development work, negotiation of loan documents, joint-venture agreements, and hotel management agreements. A member of the High Potentials Program class of 2024, Abe received his JD from the Emory University School of Law.

What is one piece of advice that greatly impacted you?

As a first-year associate at another large firm, I worked occasionally with an older, semi-retired former partner, for the most part handling minor residential real estate closings. He once asked me to describe the difference between a good lawyer and a great lawyer. Whatever my response was, it was incorrect, as he went on to explain the difference as follows: "A great lawyer answers the phone." We then spent several minutes discussing the virtue of an attorney's being responsive and communicative, with clients in particular, and the lesson really stuck with me. It is so easy to get caught up in the daily grind, and particularly easy to quickly fall behind on emails or missed calls, but I try always to remember to be communicative with clients even when (and, perhaps, particularly when) I am running late on a deadline, and to make regular communication a priority part of my practice.

An attorney might do terrific work, from a substantive perspective, but if they are not responsive to communications from the client, the client likely is either not going to recognize the quality of their work, or otherwise just may not care. On the flipside, an attorney whose work is even just average, but who is super responsive and communicative with her clients, is likely to make the clients feel that they are on top of their needs and that they are being appropriately looked out and cared for. This particular advice has proven to be a valuable pearl of wisdom.

Can you tell us about your family background and how it has influenced your life and career choices?

Well, I grew up in a Jewish family, so it was either this or going to medical school, right? I kid, I kid. My mother was a college professor for nearly forty years, and my father is a true “people person” – the kind of guy who has actually made multiple longtime friends after sitting next to them on an airplane, and who, through decades of business, spends much of his time speaking to, negotiating with, or schmoozing with others. Not to be overly cliché about it, but from my mother I think I developed a love of learning and an enthusiasm for teaching and coaching others, and from my father a love of talking with people, trying to understand and empathize with others, and a penchant for using humor to try to lighten the mood and drive human connection.

Curiosity and the love of learning took me to graduate school, and the dual roles of educator and negotiator drew me to the corporate side of law. I find that much of my day-to-day role involves educating clients, whether by describing what I believe to be “market” terms in connection with any particular type of transaction, explaining the law and/or risks associated with open issues on any given contract negotiation, or providing general business advice (sometimes upon the client’s request, sometimes unsolicited). I also find myself constantly communicating with others, whether by phone or by email. I enjoy both aspects of my practice, and in at least that sense, am clearly my parents’ child.

What is one piece of advice you would give to individuals who want to get into the legal field?

Don’t do it! I’m kidding again. I would advise that they don’t do it *without a goal and plan to achieve that goal*. When I first started law school, I wasn’t sure whether I wanted to be a practicing lawyer at all. I have ended up in a good place, but it took me several years to kind of find my way to a place of career happiness and contentment. As with anything that is extremely time- and energy-consuming, and perhaps as extraordinarily expensive, it is silly to go in with the “well this seems like it could be interesting, let’s just see how it goes” approach that I took to entering law school.

Of course, plans and priorities change over time, and that is totally okay, but I would recommend that an individual not go off to law school without a specific, articulated, and measurable goal of what she wants to get out of the experience, and how pursuing law school will tangibly impact her ability to achieve that goal. Alternatively, before pursuing law school, I would encourage an individual to consider whether their goal may realistically be achieved without going to law school, whether in a paralegal role, through non-attorney employment with a non-profit, political organization, or government agency, or in some other manner. If so, the costs (in terms of time, energy, and money) of pursuing law school just may not be worth it. This said, I *did* find law school to be really interesting, and I feel like things have worked out well (so far). But, in hindsight, it certainly seems prudent to go in with a goal and plan.

What do you hope to accomplish in the High Potentials Program?

I hope to improve my organization and personal accountability with respect to business development, and to expand my internal networking reach. I have come to understand that business development takes time, and deliberate effort, particularly at the career stage in which I find myself. Prior to my participation in the High Potentials Program, I have held loose ideas of existing or prospective clients to whom I would like to reach out or re-connect, and of related business development goals and ideas; however, I have not, in recent years, kept a regularly-updated business plan, or consistently organized my thoughts regarding personal business development in a way that is coherent, includes clear actionable items, and describes measurable and achievable middle- and long-term goals.

I hope that, through participation in the High Potentials Program and a renewed sense of personal focus and accountability on business development, I can meaningfully improve in this regard. Additionally, I am hopeful that, through the High Potentials Program’s internal networking programs, I can better get to know (and, as appropriate, market myself to) fellow Program participants, as well the Program sponsors.

What specific goals or milestones do you hope to achieve in your professional journey?

I am mindful of the fact that plans and priorities are likely to change over time (see #3 above), and, in turn, am reluctant to commit myself to any goals or milestones further than 5-10 years out.

Over the coming handful of years, I would love to place continued focus on business development and grow my practice – both in terms of scope of work (while I enjoy the typical commercial real estate “dirty” work that comprises the majority of my practice in recent years, I would like to expand that day-to-day practice to include regular work in the hospitality / live event spaces, as well) and with respect to my book of business – and, in support of reaching those goals, intend to place renewed effort on delegation and team-member training. Equity partnership, if that were an opportunity to come available to me down the road, would certainly be interesting. For now, however, I am most immediately focused on working to get my originations up to \$500k per year, and I can then look to further grow originations figures from there. If any of this audience would like to connect, whether regarding potential collaboration on legal work, a joint prospective client pitch (if it makes sense to do so), or just to meet and say hello, please reach out anytime – I would love to connect with each of you.

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