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Top Lawyers: Oscar Gomez of EPGD Business Law On The 5 Things You Need To Become A Top Lawyer In Your Specific Field of Law

An Interview With Chere Estrin



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The legal field is known to be extremely competitive. Lawyers are often smart, ambitious, and highly educated. That being said, what does it take to stand out and become a “Top Lawyer” in your specific field of law? In this interview series called “5 Things You Need To Become A Top Lawyer In Your Specific Field of Law”, we are talking to top lawyers who share what it takes to excel and stand out in your industry.

As a part of this interview series, I had the pleasure of interviewing Oscar Gomez, Managing Partner and Chair of the Litigation Practice Group at EPGD Business Law.

Oscar A. Gomez is a Partner and Chair of the Litigation Practice Group at EPGD Business Law. His practice focuses on Business Litigation, including but not limited to Business & Partnership Disputes. Oscar was born and raised in Miami, FL. Like many first generation Cuban-Americans in Miami, his parents immigrated from Cuba as children themselves. Oscar's grandparents had hopes of a better future for their children and grandchildren than the uncertain future they faced in their country. He attended Florida State University where he graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Political Science With Honors and DePaul University College of Law, J.D.

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Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series. Before we dig in, our readers would love to get to know you a bit more. What is the “backstory” that brought you to this particular career path in Law? Did you want to be an attorney “when you grew up”?

I actually did. For whatever reason, since I was about 11 or 12 years old, I was captivated with the idea of being a lawyer, winning arguments, going to law school, and being a part of determining outcomes on important matters.

Can you tell us a bit about the nature of your practice and what you focus on?

I am a business litigator which means that I primarily focus on litigating and resolving business related disputes of all kinds.

You are a successful attorney. Which three character traits do you think were most instrumental to your success? What unique qualities do you have that others may not? Can you please share a story or example for each?

I think a few qualities that have helped me are:

1) **Being emotionally even keeled:** I rarely if ever get rattled. I can only think of a couple times in my entire career that I came close to losing my cool which I think is fairly impressive given that I argue and am hired to be adversarial on a day to day basis. There have been times in my personal life where my wife has actually had to shock me into the reality that there was actually a serious situation happening in front of me because I am so conditioned not to overreact to anything.

2) **Caring:** A big part of my job is hearing people’s problems and offering them solutions. I do not think that you can fake your way through that. People can sense when you are truly invested in their story and are offering genuine solutions to their issues. I spoke to over a thousand potential clients in 2021 alone about their problems and legal issues. Each one of those individuals was looking to me for a diagnosis and cure. That is truly the most exciting and rewarding part of my job and the #1 thing that makes me get out of bed every day to go to work. For those 30 minutes to 1 hour that I speak to that potential client I have to summon all of my attention, legal knowledge, practical advice, and give that client my take. I take a lot of pride in doing that well.

3) **Inspiring confidence:** When you run a law firm or any other business, the buck stops with you. All of the hardest decisions and questions end up on your desk. You have to be able to bring people along and make them feel confident about the plan of action. I have to deal with that constantly, whether it be with clients, attorneys at the firm, opposing counsel, or the judge. There was one day last where I did six potential client consultations, had a court hearing on a complex issue that I had to argue in front of a judge, did two calls with current clients to reassure them about their case, hired a new attorney for our firm, and taught a CLE course on piercing the corporate veil. If a client, or your employees, or the judge sense the slightest bit of doubt in your decisions or assessments, that trickles down to them. Now confidence is tricky. You can try to fake that but it usually will not work. It needs to be genuine and usually comes from avid preparation and attention to detail which are easier said than done with a full schedule and people pulling you a hundred different ways but that is the challenge many times.

Do you think you have had luck in your success? Can you explain what you mean?

On a certain level, I don't know that I believe in luck as much as I used to. There are certainly instances and flashpoints over my career that I can point to and attribute to luck but more and more I've come around to the belief that everyone has opportunities in life (some people more than others, admittedly) and those opportunities need to be seized.

Reuniting with my partner Eric Gros-Dubois was certainly one of the biggest events in my career. There was certainly a degree of luck involved given the timing of it but it has been what we have done with that opportunity that has led to our success. We make a great team and great partners. I could never have imagined partnering with someone who has such a perfectly complementary skill set to me and yet at the same time sharing important personality traits and values with that person. I have also been blessed to have a couple of great mentors throughout my career and some great employees that have worked for me. Is that luck? I don't know but I'll take it.

Do you think where you went to school has any bearing on your success? How important is it for a lawyer to go to a top-tier school? Going to a top tier law school and doing well there is certainly important if you want to start out your career at a big law firm.

In my view, your school and the success you achieve in law school primarily only determines where you start. It does not guarantee you success. I think that the law school system conditions you to think that you need to go to a top tier school and that where you go to school will have a large bearing on success. My career has taught me that is largely not true. Top tier law schools are great in that they can prepare you amazingly well for your career but nowadays the reality is that there are many schools that do that exceedingly well.

I had a wonderful law school experience, but do I think it had a big effect on my success? Not really. That is not a knock, it is just the reality. Law school has its role and if that objective of preparing you is met, which by and large most law schools will do nowadays, success comes from what you do with that knowledge and skills learned not only in law school but in life.

Based on the lessons you have learned from your experience, if you could go back in time and speak to your twenty-year-old self, what would you say? Would you do anything differently?

“You are doing the big things right, my friend. Don’t worry so much, things will fall into place eventually.”

I remember back then I always had my eye on setting myself up for success, but I was constantly worried about missing something or doing something wrong. I guess more than anything I’d just tell myself to relax and be confident. I might travel a bit more. I do regret not taking an international trip or studying abroad around that time.

This is not easy work. What is your primary motivation and drive behind the work that you do?

It is challenging work to stay sharp, mentally focused and on task day after day, but it is a privilege at the end of the day to want to get up to go to work every day. My motivation is doing right by my family, my clients, my partner, and my employees, all at the same time as best as I can.

What are some of the most interesting or exciting projects you are working on now?

We are always working on interesting and exciting cases. We just recently represented the family of a world famous painter and international icon in an intellectual property dispute. We prevailed in that case thanks to the hard work of many within our office.

Where do you go from here? Where do you aim to be in the next chapter of your career?

I want to continue to learn, grow, and build. Over the last five and a half years it has been my privilege to help build a successful law firm in this community. I want to solidify our law firm's standing within the community for the long haul and continue to grow the right way.

Without sharing anything confidential, can you please share your most successful "war story"? Can you share the funniest?

1. Most successful: In 2017, I represented a realtor in defense of fraud claims from a former client. I was able to prevail after a three day jury trial. The process of litigating the case for months, pre-trial, trial, and post trial were all educational in their own right. We not only prevailed at trial but were deemed the prevailing party in the case for purposes of attorneys fees. It was a big win that really set the stage for future trial wins. It taught me so many lessons, not the least of which was that all the pieces matter, no matter how small. More importantly, it helped me know how to manage my other litigation cases better given with the backdrop of a successful jury trial.

2. Funniest: I was once hired by a big company to chase down a judgment debtor who owed a substantial amount of money in a foreign jurisdiction and had moved to Florida to shield his assets. The money he owed was for all intents and purposes stolen so my client was motivated. We eventually got him to pay the money he owed after a couple of years of post judgment collection work. The individual had moved to the United States from this foreign country and changed his name a number of times in an effort to blend in. One of the aliases he used was John Smith. I guess he figured that was a good name to blend in America. Well, it didn't work. Lol

Ok, fantastic. Let's now shift to discussing some advice for aspiring lawyers. Do you work remotely? Onsite? Or Hybrid? What do you think will be the future of how law offices operate? What do you prefer? Can you please explain what you mean?

I work mostly onsite. For what I do on a day to day basis, a big part of which is leading the associates, law clerks, and interns and handling potential new client matters, working on-site is critical. It allows me to stay organized, provide mentorship on a more consistent basis, and deal with issues that come up within the administration of our own law practice.

As far as the future, I think it depends on the law firm and practice. There are certainly practices that are more conducive to remote work for lawyers. Ours is not one of them but I have heard from some colleagues about how much more they love what they do now that they are working remotely and that is important. I am aware of that and try to always ask for feedback from my staff. An important note here is that with younger lawyers in a practice where the cases are not always the same, mentorship is critical. That cannot be lost for the sake of convenience.

How has the legal world changed since COVID? How do you think it might change in the near future? Can you explain what you mean?

The legal world has been forced to evolve and that has been mostly good. Old norms that made no sense like in person motion calendar have most likely been brushed into the dustbin of history. We have become more efficient and less expensive for clients. From a business perspective, it has only helped law firms handle more work with less in person commitments.

On the flip side, legal proceedings that need to be conducted in person (mostly jury trials) have been largely delayed and trial calendars throughout the state (of Florida) are tremendously backed up. The cases that require a jury trial are in limbo and that is certainly not good.

We often hear about the importance of networking and getting referrals. Is this still true today? Has the nature of networking changed or has its importance changed? Can you explain what you mean?

Making a name for yourself as a trustworthy professional is still critical, whether that is in your own profession, with other professionals, or with the business community at large. There is no substitute for doing good work and getting referral work from past clients but I find that most lawyers are too dismissive of networking because they are either not good at it or do not want to dedicate the time to it.

The reality is that networking has to be treated like a job, just like anything else. Going to one meeting a month is not going to get you anywhere. People need to know who you are first, then they have to like you, and lastly they have to trust you. Networking is about building relationships, not connections. Initially with the quarantine, networking had moved mostly virtual but it has made a comeback over the past 9 months or so.

Based on your experience, how can attorneys effectively leverage social media to build their practice? Be consistent, put good content out, and do it with eye towards adding value rather than getting work. The work will follow.

It's not something that comes easily for me or my team, but we know that we must be visible and offer solutions and use the platforms available to us to do just that. We have an in-house marketing team here on the ground and a marketing agency who we meet with regularly to brainstorm and find new and creative ways to become industry leaders.

Excellent. Here is the main question of our interview. What are your “5 Things You Need To Become A Top Lawyer In Your Specific Field of Law?” Please share a story or an example for each.

1. **Emotional Intelligence:** Seeing the bigger picture, not being driven by emotion in making decisions, and relating to people on a real level. That is #1.
2. **Consistency:** Being a lawyer constantly puts you in a position where people always expect you to be the most prepared person in the room and there is no way to do that without being consistent in your habits.
3. **Drive:** When you have had your head in a case for six months and are at a stalemate there has to be that something extra that tells you “look here” or “do this”. That drive to succeed for your client or for yourself or for your firm has to be there to a truly great lawyer.
4. **Purpose:** Many of the best lawyers have a chip on their shoulder. Something that fuels them to be good at what they do. Many times that is what truly separates the good from the average in this business. You do not necessarily have to carry a chip on your shoulder but you do need a purpose. Something that is going to motivate you to excel.

5. **Happiness = Mental Health** is the most underrated part of being a good lawyer. Not only is it important and undervalued generally speaking but it is also an important quality for maintaining success over the long haul.

We are very blessed that some of the biggest names in Business, VC funding, Sports, and Entertainment read this column. Is there a person in the world, or in the US with whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch, and why? He or she might see this.

There are so many but if I am forced to pick one I would say Simon Sinek. I am a huge believer in his leadership and management strategies and beliefs.

Thank you for these fantastic insights. We greatly appreciate the time you spent on this.

