

## Rainmaker Q&A: Morvillo Abramowitz's Elkan Abramowitz

*Law360, New York (September 13, 2013, 11:27 AM ET)* -- Elkan Abramowitz, a partner at Morvillo Abramowitz Grand Iason & Anello PC, is a leading litigator, known for both white collar criminal defense and civil matters who has tried many cases in state and federal court for individual and corporate clients. Elkan has built his career as a trial lawyer representing prestigious clients fallen into high stakes personal and professional crises both in and outside the courtroom. He has been described as “an unquestioned dean of the field ... with a potent combination of experience, intelligence and composure.”

Abramowitz's public service highlights include serving as chief of the Criminal Division in the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York; special deputy commissioner of the Department of Investigation for the City of New York; assistant deputy mayor for the City of New York; and special counsel to the Select Committee on Crime for the U.S. House of Representatives.

In 1999, Abramowitz received the Milton S. Gould Award for Outstanding Oral Advocacy presented by the Office of the Appellate Defender and in 2008, received the New York Council of Defense Lawyers' Norman S. Ostrow Award for the defense of liberty and the preservation of individual rights.

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

A: My practice and my ability to make rain and generate business constituted two sides of the same coin. By forsaking a big firm practice and choosing to become a white collar defense lawyer, I had to generate business from the beginning. In the early days, white collar defense was very much a niche practice and I was one of very few lawyers in it. Most large law firms did not practice in this area. Colleagues, mostly lawyers from those firms, started to refer work to me to represent their clients in white collar defense work. If I performed well, the work kept coming. To the extent that matters were referred to me by my colleagues at the defense bar, whenever I had a chance I always tried to reciprocate with a referral back to them. Never underestimate this — always try to refer back.

Over time, my white collar defense niche practice got bigger and bigger and I was part of a reciprocating network of referrals. Also, once you've been forced to look for business, you develop more confidence in your ability to do it and it becomes second nature. With respect to your ability, try to capitalize on your strengths and leverage those strengths. I have always believed that if you have had great success at trial in the courtroom in one practice area, chances are you can and will have success at trial in the courtroom in another. The skillsets needed for trial work are the same, whether it is a white collar matter or complex commercial litigation. In fact, some of my greatest victories were in civil litigation trials that were not related to my white collar practice, such as representing the former CEO of Loral Corporation in his dispute with various insurance companies and representing the former vice chairman of MacAndrews & Forbes in two civil actions pertaining to a breach-of-contract pertaining to his severance agreement.

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

A: There is one major rule of thumb: you must remain visible. As your network gets bigger and business gets more competitive, visibility is key. Socializing, attending charitable events, joining boards, writing — all of these things keep your name out there and keep people thinking of you. You can't just sit at your desk all day writing briefs. You need continually to be seen and remain visible by people who can refer matters to you and help you develop your network. While I have been fortunate to work side-by-side with some of the legends who helped to establish the white collar practice: Robert G. Morvillo, Otto Obermaier and John Martin, I also continue to work side-by-side with today's talented crop of lawyers in this area. And I continue to constantly be impressed and continually learn from them, including my younger partners at Morvillo Abramowitz.

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

A: Stay at it, and stay visible. Younger lawyers now have additional visibility options — such as a range of social media tools — and you must take full advantage of them in order to keep your name out there. Don't abandon the "old model" — such as joining bar associations, working on committees, attending dinners, participating on panels. And, I would add the new social media options — such as blogging, tweeting and connecting on LinkedIn.

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

A: Success in a matter has helped me get other matters. If you have a visible win, other lawyers will read about it and ask how you can do the same thing for them and/or their client. I have gotten cold calls saying, "I read about this, can you please represent my client?" Success is oftentimes all about luck and being in the right place at the right time. I once got a recommendation for a case by an acquaintance, a retired FBI agent, who I saw at an event. This led to my representation of a friend of his. And sometimes success comes when you put yourself in a counter-intuitive position. Joining bar association committees is key — but for me I did not always join the criminal law committees — instead, I joined committees on substantive law like securities, finance or tax. Additionally, I volunteered for committees like federal legislation, federal courts, ethics and judiciary — thereby exposing me to non-white collar practitioners who could look for me when they might have a white collar matter to refer.

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