

Law Firm Leaders: Ulmer & Berne's Scott Kadish

By **Aebra Coe**

Law360 (December 11, 2019, 2:24 PM EST) -- Scott Kadish has served as managing partner of Cleveland-based Ulmer & Berne LLP since 2016. The 160-lawyer firm has offices in Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, Boca Raton and, with the recent acquisition of litigation boutique Kaufman & Company PLLC, New York.

Here, Kadish discusses his plans to grow the law firm even further both geographically and by practice area, why a combination partner in the Midwest is an attractive prospect to the managing partner, and the one trait he thinks is most important for a law firm partner.

Your firm recently acquired Kaufman & Company. What attracted you to that combination?

We're a very litigation-heavy firm. We have, really, the premier business litigation practice in Ohio, maybe the Midwest and Steve Kaufman is a very well-known, very successful first-chair trial attorney and he had a group of really high-quality trial attorneys. The thought of adding high-quality, first-chair trial attorneys to our existing litigation practice was something we couldn't pass up. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity from where we sit.

More generally, what is your law firm's growth strategy?

We would like to become bigger because several of our litigation clients are demanding a bigger platform, both in geographic reach and in bench strength. So, to be competitive and to be able to continue to do the sophisticated litigation work we want, we do need to get larger. Adding Steve Kaufman was a great step in that direction. We were able to add a New York office. We have several matters pending in and around New York, so the ability to service our clients there is a plus.

We don't really have geographic areas in mind, but I will say we're Midwestern, we like the Midwest. We think it's a competitive advantage. And we do think it's easier to work together when your offices are closer together and we're big on teamwork and working cooperatively between groups and offices. So, the Midwest is just easier in that regard. That's what we continue to look for is growth opportunities primarily in the Midwest with firms and groups that have similar culture and quality.



Scott Kadish

Ulmer & Berne
managing partner

You mentioned there being a competitive advantage. How so?

I do think there's a competitive advantage to being in the Midwest because our rates are lower than on the coasts. You take the best lawyers in the Midwest and compare them to the best lawyers on the coasts and I think they're the same, but our rates are lower just because of overhead and cost of living. I also think that the stress of life is easier and so what you get are people who are a little less stressed. They're a little friendlier, we like to say more "user-friendly." It's much easier to strike a work-life balance and be happy people and not be as stressed and I think that translates to being able to provide better client service.

Does that help as you compete for laterals for talent?

Competing for talent is an interesting thing, especially as you're talking about laterals. When we're competing for laterals, we like people who like to bet on themselves. We really pay a lot of attention to the culture fit and making sure they'll come in and work in a team setting. Those are really important things to us. We don't think of overpaying or buying someone's business. That's just not what we're interested in. We don't even like to think we compete for a lateral. We think we're a really good opportunity for people who want to grow their business in a great environment. If that's the lateral looking and that describes them, we think we're a great opportunity. We wouldn't necessarily compete, we'd be interested in joining up with people like that. It needs to be a mutually rewarding venture.

What are your goals for the law firm over the next five years?

I would like to be bigger. I don't have an exact number. I'd like to increase our diversity. I'd like to bring more younger folks into key management positions. Those are the things I think we need to do in the next five years to remain the vibrant, successful law firm we are.

Do you have any programs or initiatives that you have in place that are aimed at improving diversity?

We appointed a chief diversity officer last year and we have a much more active diversity committee that sponsors all kinds of programs. It's not just about attracting, it's about retaining and growing people. And making sure those people are successful and moving into important positions. I think we're finally getting to a place where we have adequate role models and adequate numbers to make people successful. To bring one diverse person into a firm is not a recipe for success. You need to have a critical mass so there are support systems and nobody feels like they are alone there. I think we're finally getting to that place and we really want to continue that and the next step is to move people into management positions. We're getting there, but I do think we have room to grow and improve and I hope that happens.

What is one thing your firm does with regard to the delivery of legal services that is different from the rest of the industry?

I think we're better at developing personal relationships and not just emailing people. All of our successful attorneys get out from behind their desks, get off the phone, and actually go and see people and develop personal relationships with people. For me personally, that's the fun of it, as opposed to just sitting at your desk, cranking out legal work.

What one trait is most important for a law firm partner?

That's such a difficult question. I don't know that there's just one trait. I want my folks to be hardworking. I obviously want them to be honest and have the highest integrity in all of their dealings. And I want them to be good teammates with each other and support each other. I want everyone to be smart, I think that's the price of admission. For me, if I had to just say one I'd say I want them to be good teammates that work well with each other. There's a lot of smart people, a lot of hardworking people, I'm assuming they're honest. My hope is that they play well in the sandbox with others.

What well-known lawyer, alive or dead, would you most like to have lunch with and why?

Thurgood Marshall. Because what he faced and how he succeeded and what he accomplished in his life to me is just unmatched. I would love to hear how he got started and what his childhood was like, all of that. I think it would be fascinating.

--Editing by Katherine Rautenberg.