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KESSLER & SOLOMIANY

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Their Clients' Destinies



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It's all about Respect and Reputation

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By Mary Welch
Photography Jeremy Adamo

For elementary schools it's all about the three Rs — reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic. But for Kessler & Solomiany, an elite family law practice, it's all about the two Rs — reputation and respect.

"Our short-term goal and long-term goal is maintaining our reputation — handling cases professionally and earning the trust and respect of our clients, opposing counsel, colleagues and judges", says Founding Partner Randall M. Kessler. "We want to be able to look at ourselves and have our opponent look at us and say that we handled the case the right way and in a professional way."

Reputation again comes into play when a case ends up in front of a judge who demands to know why it wasn't settled. He adds "They want to know why your client is making unreasonable demands and we are not ethically allowed to tell the judge what we have advised our clients. All we can do is ask the judge to give us a fair hearing. That's where reputation matters," he says, "Judges don't know our clients, but I want our clients to know and feel that their lawyers are respected, listened to and, because of that, they will get a fair hearing."

To Marvin L. Solomiany, managing partner, reputation is "everything we have in this field. We try to pass that along to co-workers and remind them that everything they do is a reflection of themselves and the firm. We take our job very seriously as officers of the court. Our word is worth everything." In recognizing that approach, Solomiany was honored as the recipient of the Joseph T. Tuggle, Jr. Professionalism Award by the Family Law Section of the State of Georgia in 2019.

Since the founding of the firm in 1991, Kessler & Solomiany has earned an impeccable reputation and the admiration and respect of — well, just about anyone who comes in contact with them. They have represented well-known, high-ranking executives, athletes, politicians, television stars and musicians with

dignity, respecting their privacy, while protecting their children, income and reputation. At the same time all clients, "regular" people are given the same attention because family law doesn't discriminate, everyone can have a family law problem.

Their cases, which deal with family law issues including divorce, custody, support, pre/post nuptial agreements and the like, are hard to leave at the office. "If you want to turn it off at 5:30, don't go into family law. You're dealing with real problems. If you

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don't want to spend your life helping people, then you're not in the right business," Kessler says.

Domestic law is the toughest field in law, Solomiany believes. "In criminal law you have bad people acting their best. In domestic law you have good people acting their worst. It's a daily struggle getting clients to understand the do's and don'ts of going through the process."

Unlike many legal issues, many people have some sort of history with the field of divorce. "As soon as they find out you're a divorce attorney they want to share their stories. Every day someone comes up and tells me their story or about someone they knew," says Solomiany. "I was at a funeral the other day and this lady sitting across from me was talking about her marriage and her rationale for proceeding with a divorce."

With the divorce rate around 50 percent, theoretically half the people they meet have gone through a divorce. "That's what makes it hard because everyone wants to be a Monday morning quarterback," says Kessler. "Everyone has an opinion, but no two cases are alike. We will have people tell us that one of their friends got 50 percent custody but another friend didn't and they want to



Marvin L. Solomiany

know why. Well, one friend doesn't have a drug problem!" Adding with a laugh, "It's like that coffee mug that says 'Don't confuse your Google search with my law degree!'"

Starting Out

Although the firm is one of the most respected family law firms in the country, the beginnings were a little less auspicious. After receiving a degree from Brandeis University, Kessler graduated from Emory University School of Law (where he now teaches a course in Family Law Jury Trials) and practiced at other family law boutique firms. He decided to bet on himself and started his own firm where he "took anything that came in the door. After a year or two I started doing just divorce. I found it more rewarding and my clients were appreciative that I was good at it as opposed to many other clients who wanted to hire me for traffic court cases or other matters because I was young and eager. I hired a paralegal, and we were off and running."

Solomiany graduated with distinction from the University of Michigan and, like Kessler, attended Emory University School of Law. A mutual friend introduced them and Solomiany spent his first summer of law school working with Kessler. "Marvin came and never left."

For his part, Solomiany remembers that "no job was beneath me when I worked with Randy. I was happy to get my feet in the door and would do anything to prove myself," he says. "Even getting Randy's laundry," he adds laughing.

He worked at the office all through law school and "I liked it and knew I was an asset. I didn't even interview with any other law firms. I knew this was an opportunity to build from the ground up together and mold the firm into our values and priorities. Twenty-six years later, I wouldn't change it."

In fact, their biggest argument was putting Solomiany's name on the door. "It was a struggle," Kessler admits. "Marvin was humble and young and he didn't think he had earned it. I think it said who we were — a firm building a great reputation with a great work ethic. I wanted people to know how valuable and respected he was, despite his young age at that time."

In addition to his legal proficiency, Solomiany is the self-appointed IT guy. "We've been paperless for a long time — before it was cool. My first website design project back in the early days was reading "Microsoft for Dummies," and three days later we had a website," he says proudly. "We try to model the firm to be on the cutting edge of technology, the same with the law."

Thanks to his tech savvy, they were prepared to transition to a hybrid working model long before COVID and they have upgraded equipment and software to meet the times. "We want to make it as easy and effective as possible for people to work and they appreciate it. Frankly, the now older ones in the firm had to get used to working from home, but just because older folks were not used to it, doesn't mean we should limit the new generation," he says.

"The practice of divorce law is difficult and we try to make it as easy as possible for our employees to effectively do their jobs," says Solomiany. "Our firm's culture is a reflection of the way Randy started it. He's the nicest guy in the world and great to work with. The biggest thing I've learned from him is to make sure to treat everyone like you would like to be treated. It's a culture where we understand everyone has challenges and struggles in their personal lives. We are as accommodating as we can be. Ultimately, we know the happier our employees are, the better job they will do."

The office's technology also allowed them to get through COVID isolation better than most (although there were many problems caused by court closures and rule changes). The team was used to

having the ability to work remotely. All the files were already in the cloud and the work continued, regardless of whether the physical offices were open or closed.

Today's firm

Currently, the firm has 16 attorneys and about 30 total employees in two offices, one downtown, the other in north Buckhead. Thad F. Woody is the executive partner, who in addition to representing clients, is trained as a Guardian ad Litem, which is a court-appointed guardian to investigate matters related to child custody and parenting time to help the court reach the best decision. Woody also was recently sworn in as the national Chair of the Family Law Section of the American Bar Association, ten years after Kessler served in that role as the only other such chairperson from Georgia.

They also like to have more attorneys than they need. "We have sufficient people to handle what walks in the door today, but what about tomorrow? We don't expect our attorneys to bill 2000 hours. The nature of this practice is putting out fires and we don't want to be running a firm where that's all our people do," says Solomiany.

If they find someone who may be valuable to the firm, they'll hire that person whether they have a current need or not, says Kessler. "We want people to do what they do best and what they like — find their niche. Some may prefer to work in a certain county or love the complicated financial stuff. Everyone goes to trial here. And we even have a dedicated, full-time family law appellate lawyer."

Pro bono work is another cornerstone of the firm and they handle pro bono cases through a variety of organizations. Aside from pro bono work, Solomiany is very involved with the Jewish community and both have been active with charities such as Habitat for Humanity and the Orphaned Starfish Foundation, which helps at-risk children including survivors of sex trafficking.

While Kessler and Woody each served as chair of the American Bar Association's Family Law section, Solomiany and Kessler also each served as chair of the Family Law Section of the Georgia Bar Association and are each Fellows in the International Academy of Family Lawyers. All the firm's lawyers are encouraged to be involved in Bar activities and to teach legal seminars on family law. "It makes us better attorneys and it forces us to learn all we can about family law and trending issues. We enjoy attending and presenting at local, state and national bar conferences" said Kessler.

The Practice

The firm has represented a variety of VIPs and has been asked to comment for the media about cases in the news to help explain this area of the law to the public. "Celebrities are dealing with the same problems as other people — children, conflicts, prenups," Solomiany says.

While some of their high-profile clients end up in the media, most do not. "The majority of our cases are not high-profile and for the majority of the high-profile clients we represent, no one



Randall M. Kessler

has any idea that we represented them or often that there even was a case,” Kessler says.

Adds Solomiany, “You’d be surprised how many of them don’t mind taking less than the half they’re entitled to so they don’t have to be in the papers. They are willing to give up a lot of money — millions — to make it easier and less public.”

Custody cases are hard, they both say, but they can also be the most rewarding since, if done right, they are helping the most innocent people involved, the children.

“I’ve never met a parent who said that the other parent didn’t love their child (well, maybe once or twice, but it’s rare). When you consider that, it brings the custody cases more into focus — which parent is in the best position to serve that child’s interest? And, sometimes you have a parent who loves their child but their actions speak louder than words,” says Kessler. As for whether to go to trial or not, he says it is always up to the client but for instance, “I’m not shocked by the results in the Johnny Depp case. The message is that anything can happen in a trial, so don’t go to trial. Try to manage your destiny.”



(Front row - left to right): Michaela Pocock, Mia Falcon, Kate Farmer, Molly Teplitzky, Stefanie Potter, Nancy Ingram-Jordan, Katie Ehrlich, Nancy Miller, Melissa Barber, Stacy Smith, Heather Bennett, Ashley Murphy (Back row – right to left): Stacy Veiga, Tykira Beauford, Doriet Fischer, Thad Woody, Steven Kirson, Randy Kessler, Marvin Solomiany, Max Fishman, A. Dwight Williams, Wayne Morrison, Anthony Rao, and Juliet Jones.

Managing your destiny means getting the case settled before it goes to trial. “We mediate a lot of cases. It’s more difficult to settle now than before,” says Solomiany. “Tensions are high; animosity is stronger than ever. Plus, you’re dealing with more complex issues.”

Rarely will a judge even allow a trial to proceed before an attempt at good faith mediation is made, Kessler says. “Almost every case we handle is highly emotional and people need to be heard. Mediation often provides that forum for

them to ‘get it off their chests’”. But to be ready for the possibility of trial, the firm has built an on-site full courtroom. They use it to practice with their clients, to give them a real-life preview of court. They believe it makes their clients, and their lawyers, better prepared for the real trial, when it happens. The KS Courtroom is also used for “private judging, cases where the parties agree to use, and pay for a “private judge” to resolve their case. In fact, Marvin Solomiany is often asked by some of the most respected family law attorneys to serve in that role (as a private arbitrator) to decide cases. He is honored to do that and says it makes him a better lawyer too, when he “gets to see the different presentation styles and how effective some are”.

Despite their success, they remain humble. “We’re lucky to be in the position we are in. We love what we do and the people we meet. And if we do our job right and work hard, I know we can, and do make a difference,” says Kessler.

As for the future? “I’m so grateful,” he says. “that, where we are now is where I’d like still to be in 10 years, we are so blessed to be in a position to help.”



AT A GLANCE

Kessler & Solomiany, LLC (KS Family Law)

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North Buckhead/Sandy Springs: 267 West Wieuca Road NE #203
Atlanta, Georgia 30342

Phone: 404.688.8810

Founder: Randall (Randy) Kessler, Year 1991

Firm Composition:

Named Partners - Randy Kessler and Marvin Solomiany

Total Attorneys - 16

Total Staff (including attorneys): 27

Practice Areas – Family Law (Divorce, Custody, Support)

Community/Civic Involvement - Various with focus on Family Law Bar involvement on local, national and international levels, teaching (Law Schools and CLEs) and writing (family law books and articles).

Pro-Bono Activities – Pro Bono work accepted and encouraged.

Awards – Marvin Solomiany - The Tuggle Professionalism Award. Superlawyers Top 100 lawyers (Marvin Solomiany and Randy Kessler) and 12 attorneys selected as Superlawyers. Marvin Solomiany and Randy Kessler have served as Chairs of the State Bar of Georgia Family Law Section. Thad Woody and Randy Kessler have served as Chairs of the American Bar Association Family Law Section.

Other Locations – Buckhead/Sandy Springs.