

If I Knew Then...Alan J. Kluger

FOUNDING PARTNER, KLUGER, KAPLAN, SILVERMAN, KATZEN & LEVINE

By Hope Winsborough

LAW



Background:

After building a successful 60-attorney law firm, powerhouse trial attorney Alan J. Kluger took a risk and launched [Kluger, Kaplan, Silverman, Katzen & Levine](#) eight years ago with a focus on litigation. Now recognized as one of the top litigation firms in the Southeast, the Miami-based practice has nearly doubled in size and recently opened an office in Minneapolis. Kluger is known for handling an array of celebrity divorces and has successfully litigated prominent cases from Hollywood to Wall Street.

The Mistake:

I was constantly selling myself. Early on in my career, probably 30 years ago, I would go to these

events or people would invite me to different business functions. I was a business litigator. I would go to these things, and all I would do is talk about myself. And I thought it was really good to tell them all about me, and I couldn't understand why I never got traction.

I was actually at an event at a group of automobile dealers in Atlanta. I was invited to speak and I spoke about a topic of law that I knew about, and then I started talking about me. And I looked out and I was getting no traction. I saw their eyes glaze over — and it sort of hit me.

I figured out that catching rather than pitching was the key to success.

And what started to happen after that — I'd pick up clients anywhere. I will be on an airplane, at a dinner, traveling with my wife somewhere in the world, and I will have a conversation. And it will go on for 20 minutes and I will know everything about them. And they don't know anything about me. They don't even know what I do.

And then they'll turn around to me and they'll say, "What do you do?" And I'll say, "I collect art and I travel." "No, no — what do you do to make money?" And I say, "I'm a trial lawyer."

And then my wife will say, because she's a former judge, "He just took your deposition."

People don't want to hear about you. They want to know that you care about them.

The Lesson:

I realized that, in my business, what I do is I learn all about my witnesses. I ask them questions and I find out all about them. And I realized two things. One, people want to talk about themselves. And in my business of being a trusted advisor and doing litigation, where people's lives and their businesses are on the line, I really can't give them advice unless I really know them. And you can't say to somebody, "Tell me about you."

So I decided that I would focus the conversation. So I say, "Where are you from? Where did you grow up? Did you go to college and what did you study?" Within 25 minutes, I know everything.

I sold encyclopedias as a young man when I was in college. And that is different because, if they let you in, they want to hear about your product. When you're a trial lawyer, they don't want you. They only call you when they need you.

So really, you need to find out all about them so you can advise them. I couldn't count on all my fingers and my toes the amount of times I've been on an airplane or in a car where, at the end of the

conversation, I've said to them, "You know, "This issue in your industry is going to be a bear in the next couple of years," and they'll look at me and say, "I have one of those pending." And then they look at me and they say, "Do you have a business card?"

People don't want to hear about you. They want to know that you care about them and that you can help solve their problems. They want to see somebody that they want in their business life.

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