

DAILY BUSINESS REVIEW

‘Dad, Let’s Focus!’ What it’s Like to Work in Law and Real Estate With Your Father

Brothers and real estate developers Nitin and Dev Motwani said their father taught them, “Always treat people well and with respect, no matter who they are or what their title is, because it’s the right thing to do, not because you expect anything in return for it.”

by Raychel Lean

A father’s influence can be significant — and for many legal and real estate professionals, it needn’t stop at home.



Alan Kluger and his daughter Lisa Jerles of Miami law firm Kluger Kaplan.

Courtesy photo.

This Father’s Day weekend, litigators at Miami’s Kluger, Kaplan, Silverman, Katzen & Levine and South Florida real estate leaders at Merrimac Ventures, Swerdlow Group and Melo Group reflect on what it’s like to work alongside the man who raised them.

Alan Kluger and his daughter Lisa Jerles both work at Kluger Kaplan, where Kluger is a shareholder and Jerles is of counsel.

How did you end up working together?

Jerles: I spent the early part of my career doing public relations in the fashion industry in New York before going to law school there. When I graduated from law



Motwani family with father Bob Motwani.

school, I had a job offer at a firm in New York, but I was looking for a different lifestyle. My husband (the only non-lawyer in our nucle-



Credit: Still AB/Shutterstock.com

ar family) got a job down here, so we made the decision to relocate and I asked my dad for a job. Fortunately, he said yes!

Kluger: Lisa and her husband were discussing Miami as an option. He got a great offer, she got a great offer (working with her dad!) and they stayed.

What do you like most about being colleagues?

Kluger: Lisa is very smart and we enjoy bouncing ideas off each other. As a founding partner at Kluger Kaplan, and as her father,



From left, Nitin, Ramola and Dev Motwani, who run real estate development and investment firm Merrimac Ventures. Courtesy photo.

it is also very rewarding watching her take on some of the firm's most challenging and complex cases. Plus, I get to nag her about my grandchildren.

What's the most challenging aspect of working together?

Kluger: We know each other so well, so when we disagree, it can sometimes make for sparks.

Jerles: My dad will come into my office or call me to talk about my son's baseball game and I have to say, "Dad, I've got 20 minutes before carpool and we have a hearing tomorrow. Let's focus!"

What's your favorite case that you've worked on together and why?

Jerles: For about a year, we were part of a trial team that traveled to Augusta, Georgia about every three weeks. Between the flight and the drive from Atlanta, we would sit in the car with Terri Meyers and Steve Silverman and brainstorm ways to steer the case in our client's favor. It was something only true

law nerds would find fun, but we loved it!

Kluger: The case we had in Georgia. We spent a ton of time on preparation and traveling to federal court there. She was instrumental in the tone and cadence we set with the court, which helped us turn the case



(left to right) Carlos Melo, Jose Luis Melo, and Martin Melo, principals at real estate development firm Melo Group in Miami. Courtesy photo.

around.

Brothers Nitin and Dev Motwani of Fort Lauderdale real estate investment and development firm Merrimac Ventures reflect on working with their father, Bob Motwani, who has died. Dev Motwani is president and CEO, while Nitin Motwani is managing partner.

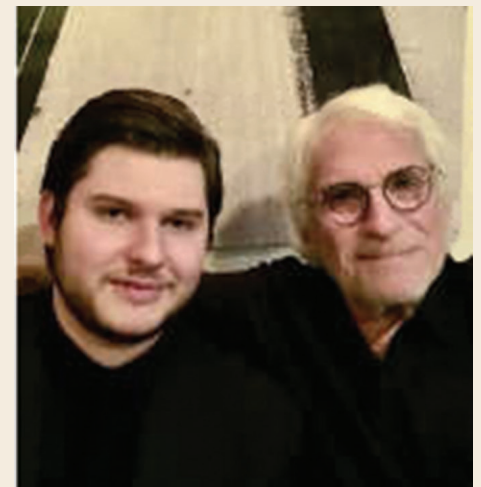
What's something you've learned from your father that has impacted your career today?

Always treat people well and with respect, no matter who they are or what their title is, because it's the right thing to do, not because you expect anything in return for it. Our father always treated people that way and, as a

result, he had a lot of respect in the community, and we believe that ultimately helped him be successful, maybe not directly but certainly indirectly. We always try to emulate that aspect of his character.

What's your favorite project that you've worked on together and why?

Definitely the Four Seasons Fort Lauderdale because it's one that the entire family worked on. Our mom and dad bought the first property on the site back in the early 90s, before he passed away. Then Nitin and our mom finished acquiring the rest of the block a decade later.



South Florida real estate developers Nick Swerdlow, left and his father Michael Swerdlow of Swerdlow Group. Courtesy photo.

And finally, Dev was responsible for designing the project and getting the entitlements, as well as doing our joint venture with Four Seasons and Fort Partners. So it was a true family effort where everyone had a hand in its success.

It's also special because it caps off our parents' vision of turning Fort Lauderdale Beach from a spring break town to a luxury family-oriented destination.

What's the most rewarding part of working with your family business?

Seeing our parents' vision come to life, and then expanding beyond that vision and creating our own vision for the future of the business.

Brothers Carlos and Martin Melo, principals at Miami real estate development firm Melo Group, discuss working with their father Jose Luis Melo.

How did you end up working together?

Real estate has been our family business for decades, starting with my grandfather more than 55 years ago. Our father gave us the opportunity to participate and share the company's vision since we were very young.

What do you like most about being colleagues?

We have a common objective and we share the same vision.

What's the most challenging aspect of working together?

On the contrary, it's not a challenge. Working with our father is working with someone who transmits experience and knowledge with all the love. He will always be our ally and friend.

Nick Swerdlow is vice president at Swerdlow Group in Miami, which monitors construction projects and oversees real estate developments and was founded by his father Michael Swerdlow.

How did you end up working together?

After studying art history in college, I spent a few years working for galleries in New York. During the summer of 2018, my father called me and asked me if I wanted to join him in the business and I decided to give it a try. Since then, I have thoroughly enjoyed my time with him in the real estate business.

What do you like most about being colleagues?

Working alongside my dad has been a very easy and gratifying experience for us both. We get along quite easily and I consider him one of my best friends.

What's your favorite project that you've worked on together and why?

We have been working on a 1.4 million-square-foot mixed-use project called Sawyer's Walk. That project covers all aspects of the real estate business, and includes major retail, a large, affordable rental component (578 units), and a 1,000-car parking garage. Because of the intricacies of the project, from its design to the construction and financing, it has been a significant learning experience, which has put me into a position of confidence going forward. That project has recently broken ground, and we are currently working on two other developments.