



PROFILED FIRMS

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Virtually Firm

By Kylie Reynolds

BEVERLY HILLS - It was one of the rare times that a majority of the attorneys at Rufus-Isaacs, Acland & Grantham LLP were gathered together in their office here. Scattered around a conference table one evening this July, the attorneys cracked jokes and chatted before heading off to dinner to celebrate the firm's anniversary.

It was only four years earlier in 2010 when, similarly situated around partner Alexander Rufus-Isaacs' dining room table, a group of attorneys chose to launch the shop with a decidedly different approach than the larger firms many of them had belonged to in the past.

In sum, they set out to have low overhead and a simple compensation system.

"What we have here is a quasi-virtual firm," Rufus-Isaacs said this summer.

Its 10 attorneys share one office, one conference room and one assistant, which are all located in the offices of Rosenfeld, Meyer & Susman LLP, where some of the attorneys previously worked.

With the exception of partners Rufus-Isaacs and Bill Grantham, the firm's attorneys are of counsel and have their own offices and practices separate from Rufus-Isaacs, Acland & Grantham.

"Most of the time we may meet our clients in this conference room here in the beginning of the relationship, we may meet them again for a closing, but otherwise they really don't care ... if we're sitting on the beach or sitting on the 40th floor of a high rise in Century City," Rufus-Isaacs said. "It makes no difference to them, it makes no difference to the work product."

The savings recouped from its low overhead allow attorneys to pocket more of their earnings, Rufus-Isaacs said, which feeds into the firm's second tenet about compensation.

There's no billable hour requirement, and every client invoice is divided between the originating attorney, the working attorney and the firm to cover overhead. That means if an attorney both scores the client and does all of the work on the case, they keep 82.5 percent of the generated fees, Rufus-Isaacs said.

Part of what makes this model attractive to practitioners, the firm's attorneys say, is its encouragement of client referrals.

"I would say somebody refers me a matter at least once a month, sometimes two to three referrals a month," said Judith Karfiol, an entertainment attorney. "Sometimes they're people who have been clients of the firm already and sometimes they're new and have come through one or another of these people, but more than half of them have come back to me with second or third projects."

To keep up a steady exchange of referrals, each attorney brings their own expertise to



Kylie Reynolds / Daily Journal
From left: Judith Karfiol, Alexander Rufus-Isaacs, Bill Grantham and David Lewis.

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the table: litigation, entertainment and media, intellectual property, business, real estate, criminal defense, estate planning, fine art, bankruptcy and insurance.

That has the added benefit that the attorneys can easily rely on each other when a question about another area of the law pops up in one of their cases, said Neil Fraser, who handles criminal defense at the firm.

The firm has been involved with some heavyweight clients, particularly in entertainment

Karfiol has done legal production for hits like Comedy Central's "Workaholics" and the Oscar-winning documentary "Twenty Feet from Stardom," while Grantham has worked on the financing of such films as "Machine Gun Preacher" and "The Grey." Rufus-Isaacs, along with co-counsel, filed a defamation suit this year on behalf of actress Ronee Sue Blakley, who alleges her acrimonious custody battle with the father of her daughter was depicted in the 2012 film "What Maisie Knew," damaging her reputation.

International cases also aren't unusual for the firm, which has strong ties overseas.

Five of its attorneys were born in the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland, while three of them are qualified as English barristers. Attorney Jacqueline Perry, who litigates tort and contract disputes in both London and Los Angeles, even has the storied distinction of being Queen's Counsel.

"Clients appreciate someone who has an international outlook," Grantham said. "You have a certain sense of how the pieces of the world are put together."

But it's these varied experiences and personalities that also set the firm apart for its attorneys, Fraser said.

Because the firm's attorneys don't work together every day, they talk regularly and meet for lunch at least once a month. So it's attractive that its attorneys aren't just lawyers, Fraser said.

For example, Fraser himself is a DJ. Grantham is a writer and former journalist. Attorney David Lewis is a musician.

"I've never been in a legal firm before I joined this one, and I avoided them like the plague, but this one was different," Fraser said. "It doesn't at all have that big firm environment or even that small firm environment. It's everything positive without anything negative."

kylie_reynolds@dailyjournal.com

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