ATTORNEY SPOTLIGHT SERIES: Q&A with Lisa Pomerantz

Lisa Pomerantz is a graduate of Harvard University and Boston University Law School with more than 30 years of legal and dispute resolution experience. Lisa works primarily with entrepreneurs on commercial and corporate matters, and to resolve business and employment disputes amicably and cost-effectively. We recently sat down with Lisa to discuss her practice, how she found herself on her current career path, and the changes that she’s seeing in small and midsize law.

A little bit about Lisa’s background and current practice.
I am a Harvard University and Boston University Law grad. I worked as a litigator for a while, but didn’t like it. After working for 15 years as in-house counsel, I eventually launched my own practice, where I handle a lot of transactional and dispute resolution matters, and also do quite a bit of work as settlement counsel. I am an arbitrator and mediator for the American Arbitration Association and am on the mediation panel of the Eastern District of New York.

Outside of those things, I also conduct workplace trainings and mediations, and teach negotiation and conflict resolution at Touro Law School on Long Island.

Are there any industry-wide changes you’re seeing in small and midsize law? Have these changes presented opportunities, challenges or both, and what are you doing to address them?
Consumers and small businesses now have access to legal information through official government agency websites as well as private services like LegalZoom®. Many lawyers are resistant to these developments but I think we need to embrace them. I am a firm believer that people should do what they can on their own and then seek the help of lawyers when they really need us to deliver value. When I teach, I encourage my students to recognize that these changes are happening, and to seek opportunities to provide value that aren’t going to be eliminated by technology. In fact, I will soon be going to Lithuania for a couple of weeks to teach the legal aspects of the workplace in the digital age.

The digital landscape has also changed how people select attorneys: online reviews are huge, and it is not uncommon for clients to choose a lawyer solely based on what they read about you online. As a solo practitioner, the positive reviews I receive allow me to compete with much bigger firms.

Where do you see yourself, your firm, and the industry three years from now?
In many ways, the legal industry has been struggling because it hasn’t been meeting clients’ needs for cost-effective legal services. The day-to-day legal work that firms rely on is changing, largely due to advances in technology. Smaller firms now have access to the same legal research tools that the big firms have and I embrace all of the available resources in my practice. The truth is that only lawyers who meet people’s needs will survive and thrive, and these tools level the playing field so that the best small firm lawyers can compete.
**What’s the most challenging thing about your job?**

One thing that’s particularly challenging is when clients don’t come to you early enough. When this happens, you’re often trying to help them out of difficult situations, but the choices are limited. It is for this reason that I try to structure my fee arrangements in a way that encourages clients to come to me with their problems early. Some firms charge a quarter-hour as minimum, but I charge one-tenth of an hour—and I also try to keep my rates reasonable. Structuring my business this way means that my clients aren’t afraid to call me right away, and they also pay their bills without arguing over each line item.

I try to give my clients as much autonomy as possible: I send out a monthly newsletter containing helpful legal tips, and generally try to give people information so that they can manage as much as they can on their own, but also so that they can recognize issues early and call me before things get ugly.

**If you could give new lawyers one piece of advice, what would that be?**

Many law students are interested in litigation—but keep in mind that people used to think dueling was a good idea to resolve conflict, too. The trend is toward resolving conflicts in a more collaborative and cost-effective way. It would be wise to keep this in mind as you choose which law school classes to take and what to specialize in.

**In one sentence, describe what being a lawyer means to you.**

It means helping my entrepreneurial clients be successful, and helping people resolve their problems in an amicable and cost-effective way.