

Stay Small or Merge Big: My Law Firm's Story

By Clint David of Fox Rothschild – (Feb. 18, 2015) – How in the world did I find myself here?

I would have to say the crystalizing moment was two years ago at our first shareholder “retreat” at David & Goodman. One of the main agenda items was to discuss the future of our firm – what would that look like and how would we get there?



Clint David

The overriding question was how do we move our Dallas-based 18-lawyer firm into the future and the next generation of leadership and what, primarily, will be our vehicle for growth?

I discussed organic growth (which has been our history), laterals (risky and an uncertain science at best), adding a section or small group (expensive and risky) or a merger. Since this was the first time my partners had ever heard me utter the “M” word, I think it caught everyone by surprise.

One person said, “Clint, we’ve never heard you discuss merging before.”

My response: “You have now.”

I am a fourth generation Dallas native and entrepreneurship is in my bloodline. My great-grandfather was Simon David (just one guy, not two people), the founder of Simon David Grocery, which began in Dallas in 1887.

Since my father, who took over the business from his father, grew and expanded the business and sold the business in the 1960’s to Tom Thumb, I always knew that I would not have the grocery business to go into.

I felt like building some kind of business, but what kind?

After starting in 1980 with a large downtown Dallas law firm, I considered getting out of the practice of law, as the big-firm world just was not for me. Instead, I decided to start my own law firm and began this firm with just my secretary in 1984. Since all I knew was law, I set out to build a legal business. After 30 years, I became an overnight success.



Fox Rothschild LLP Partners Mark A. Goodman, Christopher I. Clark, Michael S. Rumac and Dallas Office Managing Partner Clinton J. David

Our firm’s business model for growth (yes, we have one, which sets us apart from most other law firms) was to cherry pick young talent from other big firms who had “made their bid with the devil” and were ready to have a better quality of life while joining a firm where they could hopefully spend their career.

Therefore, our firm has essentially become a haven for large-firm refugees with an entrepreneurial spirit and desire to grow their own clientele. >

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You can imagine, therefore, my trepidation in mentioning the “M” word to a number of large-firm refugees who came to our firm to leave the big-firm hassle behind.

Was Clint pulling a bait and switch on us?

To my pleasant surprise, it seemed as though all of our partners around the table digested this option and saw that in concept this could be a platform for future growth, financial stability, tremendous growth in practice areas and an opportunity to play on a bigger stage.

Since the concept of a merger had now been put into the atmosphere and not rejected out of hand, the next and largest question was, with whom?

Over the years, I have received countless calls from search firms leaving voicemails about successful national firms looking to have a Texas or Dallas presence. I routinely ignored all of them.

By the same token, it was very apparent that merger-mania was in full swing here and I knew there would come a time in the future when every quality firm that wanted to move into Texas would have done so. At some point that ship would sail and we would either be on the ship or left sitting at the dock.

We had discussions with some very fine national law firms who expressed an interest in us. We very quickly came to realize that not all large national firms are alike and each has its own goals, personalities and cultures. It was critical to find a firm that was a solid fit for us – one who maintained our family-like culture.

Last May, I attended a real estate closing for a client of our firm from the northeast. While meeting with one of our client’s principals, who unbelievably has the name of David Goodman (our firm’s

name was David & Goodman), David asked in passing if I would like to meet his partner who was at the closing. Upon meeting David’s partner, we exchanged pleasantries.

“Has your firm ever considered merging with another law firm?” he asked.

I replied that we had and that it was something that we would always keep an open mind about. David’s partner then mentioned that his brother-in-law happens to “run a big law firm with offices all over the United States” and asked if I would be willing to provide my business card. Although I was in preliminary discussions with another firm, I had nothing to lose. My client’s brother-in-law is Abe Reich, the co-chair of Fox Rothschild.

A little more than four months after that very informal discussion with David Goodman and his partner in Dallas, we closed the merger with Fox Rothschild on Oct. 1.

We found Fox Rothschild was a firm very much like ours, just on a much larger scale. Fox is a culture-based law firm where lawyers come to stay and spend their entire careers. They are a middle-market firm with many more clients than the traditional large, national firm. Our billing rates and the rates of Fox are very consistent, which meant our firm has had no rate increase since the merger.

I often think about what would have happened had I not attended that closing, not met David >



Fox Rothschild LLP Partner Mark A. Goodman, Firm Co-Chair Abraham C. Reich, Dallas Office Managing Partner Clinton J. David and Firmwide Managing Partner Mark L. Silow

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Fox Rothschild LLP Partner Mark A. Goodman, Firm Co-Chair Abraham C. Reich, Dallas Office Managing Partner Clinton J. David, Firmwide Managing Partner Mark L. Silow and Partner David Grant Crooks

Goodman, nor had David not suggested that I meet his partner. Whether it was good fortune or written in the stars, I truly believe our respective firms instantly felt that each had found in the other a partner for the future.



Fox Rothschild LLP Co-Chair Abraham C. Reich, Entertainment Department Chair Darrell D. Miller and Dallas Office Managing Partner Clinton J. David

Not much has really changed so far other than the phones are answered differently and the signs are different out front. We are still the same small family that we were except we are now charged with growing Fox's Dallas presence and brand,

which will hopefully expand throughout the State of Texas.

I know our entire firm takes great pride that after a 107-year history of Fox, our little law firm was Fox's first ticket to the great State of Texas.

So now my mission, as it has always been, is to "look out over the horizon" and continue to build and grow our firm.

This time, though, it is with tremendous financial resources, practice areas and expertise.

Looking back 30 years ago, I could have never imagined that this would be the next phase of our firm, but here we are, propelled up into the ether zone. I guess it really is true that the best definition of good luck is when hard work and preparation meets opportunity.

Clint David is a 1980 graduate of Texas Tech School of Law. He is the partner-in-charge of Fox Rothschild's Dallas office. Clint has more than 30 years of experience handling a wide array of business and real estate matters. He frequently provides representation to clients engaged in commercial real estate transactions, including the acquisition, disposition, financing, development and leasing of various types of real property. His full bio can be found at www.foxrothschild.com/attorneys/Clinton-David.html.

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