

Minority Powerbrokers Q&A: Gibson Dunn's Ronald Kirk

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Ronald Kirk is co-chair of Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP's international trade practice. He focuses on providing strategic advice to companies with global interests. Prior to joining the firm in April 2013, Ambassador Kirk served as the 16th United States Trade Representative and was a member of President Obama's cabinet, serving as the president's principal trade adviser, negotiator and spokesperson on trade issues. He draws upon more than 30 years of diverse legislative and economic experience on local, state and federal levels.

As the first African-American mayor of Dallas, from 1995 to 2001, Kirk earned a reputation for bringing together diverse coalitions to get things done. Previously, Governor Ann Richards appointed him as Texas Secretary of State, he served as a legislative aide to U.S. Sen. Lloyd Bentsen, and he was named as chair of Texas' General Service Commission. Ambassador Kirk also served as a City of Dallas assistant city attorney. He was named by BET Networks and ICON MANN as one of the 28 "Men of Change, trailblazers whose formulas for success lie in empowering others at home and across the globe" (2014).



Ronald Kirk

As a participant in Law360's Minority Powerbrokers Q&A series, Ambassador Kirk shared his perspective on five questions:

Q: How did you break the glass ceiling in the legal industry?

A: My journey to a career in the law was completely intuitive. There were no lawyers of color that I knew of as a young boy growing up in Austin, and I was singularly inspired to seek a career in the law by the heroic efforts of Thurgood Marshall to make real the promise of our Constitution for people of color.

Q: What are the challenges of being a lawyer of color at a senior level?

A: The challenges that I face at this stage of my career are more related to my frequent transitions between public service and the practice of law than they are due to my being African-American. I still have to make a compelling case to prospective clients as to why I am uniquely suited to assist in the

resolution of their problems. However, my having served successfully at the highest levels of public service does work to my advantage in credentialing myself as a seasoned problem solver.

Q: Describe a time you encountered discrimination in your career and tell us how you handled it.

A: Throughout my career I have been confronted with a number of awkward situations in which my clients were surprised to learn that I was African-American ... after all, I "didn't sound black!" Fortunately, I have always been blessed with a wicked sense of humor and an uncanny ability to adjust my fee accordingly in response to such insults.

Q: What advice would you give to a lawyer of color?

A: Our diversity is what makes America the richest and most talented country in the world. Use that to your competitive advantage, and invest and improve your skills at every opportunity that you're given to do so.

Q: What advice would you give to a law firm looking to increase diversity in its partner ranks?

A: Diversity is the lifeblood of competition ... it makes us stronger, wiser and ultimately more successful. Those firms that reflect the values and demographic of their clients and the communities in which they serve will prosper greatly over those who don't.

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