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Rainmaker Q&A: Liner Grode's Larry Stein

Law360, New York (July 12, 2013, 1:00 PM ET) -- Stanton "Larry" Stein is a senior partner in the Los Angeles office of Liner Grode Stein Yankelevitz Sunshine Regenstreif & Taylor LLP and practices in the firm's entertainment & media litigation department. His clientele includes actors, writers, directors, producers, musicians, high net worth individuals, entertainment guilds, talent agencies, personal and business management companies, independent production companies and interactive gaming companies.

Stein was profiled in California Lawyer as one of the top five "A-List Entertainment Lawyers" changing Hollywood, and in Los Angeles Magazine. He has been featured in Forbes Magazine, the Daily Journal's California Law Business, and was listed in the "Rising" section of Entertainment Weekly's "101 Most Powerful People in Entertainment. He is also regularly listed as a "Super Lawyer" in Los Angeles Magazine and has appeared on the cover of the National Law Journal. Additionally, Stein has received the ACLU Foundation's Pro Bono Civil Liberties Award. He is listed in The Best Lawyers in America and the Daily Journal's 100 Most Influential Lawyers in California. He has consistently ranked No. 1 in the publication Chambers USA: America's Leading Business Lawyers.

Stein is also a professor of law and has taught the entertainment law class at USC Law School the last 10 years. He also taught the entertainment law class at Stanford Law School and has lectured at numerous law schools including, Yale, Harvard and the University of California Boalt Hall Law School.

Q: How did you become a rainmaker?

A: Being at the right place at the right time (luck aided by perseverance). Seriously, there were two opportunities that catapulted me to rainmaker status. First, I was politically active and got to know Tom Hayden, Jane Fonda's former husband. Jane, who took pity on me as a young wannabe entertainment litigator, introduced me to her lawyer, Barry Hirsch, who was one of the most prominent entertainment lawyers in Hollywood. As Jane predicted, Barry and I quickly became good friends. Through Barry, I was given the opportunity to represent many of the most significant stars in Hollywood. In the early days, it was Jane Fonda, Robert Redford, Sean Connery, and as time went on, it became Madonna and Jennifer Lopez. Once you have handled a case for people of this stature in Hollywood, their compatriots, transactional lawyers, personal managers, business managers, agents and publicists refer you when they need a litigator.

Second, a truly chance meeting resulted in an introduction to a television transactional entertainment law firm. Believe it or not, my former partner Bob Kahan ran into a vehicle owned by a business manager in the parking lot of our office building. When he left a note, the business manager was so impressed with his integrity that she offered to introduce us to Sloan & Kuppin, an up and coming television law firm. My first chance to work with that firm was when they asked me to do a Directors Guild of America arbitration (which of course, I had never done before). Luckily, I won the DGA arbitration and that solidified my

relationship. Together we developed the "walk off," where a lead on a successful television show would threaten to leave unless they received greater compensation. We began with Gary Coleman on *Different Strokes* and quickly moved to Eric Estrada on *CHIPS* and then to John Schneider and Tom Wopat on *The Dukes of Hazzard*. These cases established my "street cred" in television. Today almost every television star renegotiates their compensation after the second or third season of a successful television series.

Q: How do you stay a rainmaker?

A: It is more difficult to stay a rainmaker over a 40 year career than to become one. I continue to make rain by constantly changing and evolving my legal practice. Never get comfortable with what you are doing in your practice. Always strive to go beyond where you have been before. My work in television is an example. As I said earlier, my first high-profile cases in television involved the "walk off." With the power this technique offered talent, we were able not only to increase their fixed compensation but also to obtain backend (profit participation). This led to audits and to lawsuits involving accounting for profits. As a result of the elimination in the financial and syndication rules, I was able to develop a new form of accounting claims involving vertical integration (self-dealing). Now with digitalization and the delivery of television on various platforms, I am able to again evolve accounting lawsuits to test new areas. I reinvent myself and my practice each time an opportunity arises.

Q: What advice would you give to an aspiring rainmaker?

A: First and foremost, be yourself. Work with what you are, not with what you think others expect you to be. Use whatever is personal to you to your advantage. If you are gay, use it. If you are Latino, use it. These are unique qualities which help gain entry into a community with which you have a special connection. In Hollywood, being Jewish doesn't hurt. Once you have gained access, use your uniqueness to gain exposure and power.

Always conduct yourself as if you were being observed, because you are. Every time you interact with another person or group, you are being assessed and judged. People do not know how good a lawyer you really are. But they do know if you conduct yourself admirably. You want people who come away from every encounter and say, "That is the type of person I want to be. And that is the type of lawyer I want to represent me." Being a successful lawyer is being a successful person. It starts with you and works outwardly, not the other way around.

Be involved. Whatever it is that interests you, pursue it with abandon. You are at your best when you are doing what you care about. If that means positions of power in organizations, accept that responsibility and use it as a proving ground. Liking you and respecting you is a road to trusting you.

Q: Tell us a tale of landing a big client.

A: Probably half of my clients are individuals or companies I was adverse to in the first instance. But the way I unexpectedly landed one client was the extreme of this rule. The daughter of a prominent actor contacted me with her displeasure of a photograph in the *Girls Gone Wild* magazine. I contacted the magazine and arranged to have a meeting with Joe Francis at his offices. The receptionist told me that Mr. Francis was busy but would be available soon. I sat there for over a half hour and the anger began to well up. Finally, Joe Francis came into the lobby and proceeded, without introduction, to berate me and my client with expletives. Although it is very difficult to provoke me, his red-faced rant within inches of my own face did it.

I proceeded to respond using equally colorful expletives about him and his magazine. I walked out and slammed the door. When I was halfway down the hallway, I heard Joe

Francis yelling my name. As he approached me, I felt certain a fistfight would ensue. Instead, he gave me a big bear hug and said, "You are the kind of tough guy I want as my lawyer." I explained that I could not become his lawyer because I had a case against him, which he promptly resolved favorably to my client. Within a week of finalizing the matter, I received a call from Joe Francis retaining me as his counsel. Although we have now parted ways, this was still the most bizarre initial contact I have had with a client.

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