

# TEXAS LAWYER

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## ON THE RISE



**PARTNER**

### John C.C. Sanders

#### Experience:

Winston & Strawn, 2017-present  
Fish & Richardson, 2008-2017  
U.S. Court of Appeals, Second Circuit,  
2007-2008

#### Education:

University of Texas School of Law, 2007  
Texas A&M University, 2002

#### What drew you to a career in law?

Even when I was young, I knew I wanted to be a lawyer. I've always enjoyed solving problems. I grew up watching my father's own legal practice and the way he approached client relationships. He was his clients' attorney for sure, but he was also their friend and, at times, acted as consultant, business advisor, and even therapist. Being able to problem solve and help people the way my dad did with his clients played a very large role in my becoming an attorney.

#### Have you set a specific goal that you want to achieve in the next year?

I have several significant trials coming up this fall and winter with tens of millions of dollars in dispute. I am very focused on winning those for my clients. I also have a pro bono matter for a veteran with PTSD. We are challenging the designation of his discharge. If I can get the designation changed, it will substantially benefit his and his family's wellbeing. I'd really like to get a win on that one.

#### What has been your proudest career moment and your biggest hurdle?

As I came up through the associate ranks, my old firm's outlook on partnership changed. Before, the thinking was that if someone was an excellent young attorney who had demonstrated the ability to manage complex cases for partners with books of business, then that attorney should make partner without any business of their own. But around the time that I was in my sixth year with the firm, the firm stance had substantially changed and the focus was on your book of business if you wanted to make partner. I had always been an excellent brief writer and researcher and had developed into a trusted case manager for litigation partners. But I had not spent any time focused on developing my own book of business. In

fact, the partners that I supported had so much work that it seemed impossible for me to have the time to even think about developing my own business, let alone actually coming up with a plan to do so and executing on it. That was a big hurdle. Nevertheless, I shifted gears and made the time to develop relationships and it has really paid off. Today, I have a large roster of clients who trust me with their work. Most of my clients are repeat customers, who have come to me with new matters after seeing how I handled their first matters. It's extremely rewarding to achieve great results for clients and see them come back to ask for assistance on new work because they were pleased with the results we achieved for them in the past. Having this book of business has allowed me to develop a team of associates who service these clients and watching these team members develop as lawyers has been very rewarding. I've also been able to be a good partner to the firm and bring in millions of dollars a year in business. So I would say developing my own client base was both my biggest hurdle and proudest career moment.

#### Where do you fit on a 1-10 work-life balance scale with 10 being nirvana? Please explain.

This year, sadly, I'm about a 2. I've been fortunate to bring in a significant amount of new work this year.

Managing this case load is a major undertaking and it's important to me to not let anything slip through the cracks. After all, the clients trusted me with these matters and I want to do everything I can to honor that trust. On the other hand, I do find time for my family and make it a point to be home for a couple hours each evening to spend time with my wife and two-year-old son. They are the best part of my day. I also make the time to serve charities in Dallas and carve out time for my work as a board member with Interfaith Family Services here in Dallas.

**What is the top quality that you've used to succeed in the profession?**

Integrity. Being someone who is truthful and honorable goes a long way in all aspects of life, including in the legal profession. It counts with clients, judges, juries, and legal recruits. I don't make representations to any of these audiences that I do not truly believe. Because of that, I've developed a reputation as someone you can count on, even in the future when living up to a past promise is not easy to do or personally beneficial to me. It seems there are far less people today who conduct themselves this way, but it pays real dividends when you do. It's allowed me to achieve great results with judges and juries. It's allowed me to develop long lasting client relationships. And, as hiring partner for two firms now, it's allowed me to recruit some of the best legal talent in the nation.

**Who is your favorite mentor and why?**

I have two lawyers who raised me from a pup-lawyer, Tom Melsheimer

and Steve Stodghill. Tom is the quintessential trial lawyer. He has countless wins under his belt and piles of awards for his trial achievements. He taught me the importance of integrity in the legal profession. He showed me what a difference it made with judges. I was always amazed at how his representations to the court were taken as a given because he had earned the reputation for always being truthful as an officer of the court. Tom took me under his wing and made me into the trial lawyer I am today and I am incredibly grateful that he took an interest in me so many years ago.

Steve is the greatest connector of people that I have ever known. Apart from being an incredible litigation strategist, Steve taught me the importance of developing real relationships with current and potential clients. He taught me that it is often more important to be your client's friend than it is to wow a client with your achievements. I have to give a lot of credit to Steve for teaching me the skills to develop the real and long-lasting relationships I currently have with my clients.

**What's the best advice anyone has ever given you?**

Do what's right, even when no one is looking and even when it's not good for you. You'll sleep better at night and people will take notice.

**What trends are you observing in the profession that you're excited about?**

I'm very excited about programs aimed at getting young attorneys real experience early in their careers. Several judges now have programs encouraging firms to utilize younger

associates for hearings on discovery motions and other motion practice. On my cases, I try to find opportunities for young litigators to take depositions and have stand up roles before the court. For a long time, the trend was for only the most senior attorneys to have stand up roles in front of the court without regard to what happens when those attorneys retire. This new trend is exciting because it ensures that attorneys coming up in the ranks will learn their craft and become true trial attorneys.

**What is the greatest challenge you see for the legal profession?**

The legal profession is not immune to disturbances caused by technological advances. The work that companies are doing with artificial intelligence have real implications for the legal profession. I'm not talking about AI replacing trial attorneys any time soon. But the legal research, document review and management, and data analysis performed today by attorneys and staff in large law firms could very soon be replaced with queries directed at very sophisticated computers that quickly and efficiently generate answers in real time. Finding a path to utilize this emerging technology and still have places for many younger associates and staff to work in large law firms will be a challenge that law firms need to strategically think about and plan to handle. ■