

Let it Rain



Portait by Strauss Peyton Photography

THESE LAW-SECTOR RAINMAKERS NOT ONLY SET STANDARDS FOR PERFORMANCE, THEY'RE ELEVATING KANSAS CITY'S REPUTATION AS A CENTER FOR LEGAL EXCELLENCE.

The word has applications in political fund-raising, investment banking and ad agencies, among others, but in legal circles, a Rainmaker is someone who brings to the firm more business than he or she can handle alone. The value of that trait goes well beyond a firm's top line revenues: It bespeaks a nearly unmatched level of legal skill that runs rich and deep, and people skills that build instant and enduring connections. What they bring to a firm makes its brand.

As a concept, rainmaking can—should—apply to almost any other business, because at its core, it's all about producing. There is a value to top-tier performance that shows up in the bottom line, for certain. With legal Rainmakers, though, it can't easily be discerned in the calculus that gets you to that number.

They bring millions of dollars' worth of business to their firms—in some cases, double-digit millions—and are well worth the considerable stacks of coin they earn in compensation. Yet spend a few minutes with any of them, and you immediately sense the down-to-earth qualities that underpin their connection-building successes. They are, in a word, genuine.

Consider this observation about Rainmaker status from Jim Ash of Husch Blackwell: "I don't think of myself as a big hitter," he says. "I think of myself as someone who's been incredibly fortunate over the years to have some very good mentors and opportunities to grow, along with some clients that put their faith and confidence in me and allowed me to get a lot of really good, top-notch corporate experience early in my career." See? Genuine.

Hard work and experience, these Rainmakers say, puts you in the right position to meet potential clients, opening the door to demonstrate the legal skills needed to meet their needs. Some of it is luck, some of it is being in the right place at the right time, but all of it comes down to putting in the hours at the office and the service in the community to build lasting, meaningful connections.

Twelve years ago, *Ingram's* introduced you to eight of the Kansas City region's premier legal rainmakers. Interestingly, and reflective of what's gone on in national and regional law circles since then: While all eight are still practicing today, six are with firms that have merged with others. And the two others are with firms that have retained their nameplates, but grown through small, selective acquisitions, rather than merger.

Since then, we've profiled four other high-flying lawyers in subsequent installments of our Rainmakers feature. Those four, as well, are still at it today. (You can read about all 12 on Page 39.) Combined with this year's honorees, we now have a score of specialists in everything from real-estate development to personal injury law, transactional lawyers to litigators, managing partners to practice chairs.

Collectively, they demonstrate the remarkable firepower available to both individual and corporate clients seeking legal counsel in this marketplace. They have helped Kansas City's legal community as a whole develop a national reputation for outstanding client service and successful outcomes at rates far below those commanded by large market and coastal firms.

They are, in every sense of the word, Rainmakers.

JIM ASH HUSCH BLACKWELL

Long before Husch Blackwell could reap the fruits of Jim Ash's legal acumen, Ash was the one reaping fruit—as a plant manager for Sunkist in his native California. The work he was doing there with his young wife generated the cash to put him through law school at UCLA, where he also earned his bachelor's degree.

Influenced by the types of contacts his father made as a public school system business manager, Ash was drawn to law, he said, "because it sounded like lawyers continued to be learners. Being an attorney requires you to continue to learn about clients and the things they do, but also the law as it continues to develop, statutorily and through common law."

What made this native of rural Southern California a Kansas Citian? "Five years in Los Angeles," he quips, with a stand-up comic's sense of timing. "We looked around at a lot of places when I was about to graduate from law school," Ash says. Friends and relatives provided connections to Kansas City, and after investigating it, he was sold. He took his law school finals and within 24 hours was on the road to the Midwest.

Ash has been involved in many aspects of corporate law over the past three decades, leading to his position at the helm of Husch Blackwell's Food and Agribusiness unit. In that capacity, he's worked with some of the world's leaders in agriculture and food production; firm clients include National Beef, Triumph Foods, Monsanto, Con-Agra and Dairy Farmers of America.

KC is an ideal place to make rain within that setting. "Growing up in rural Southern California, it does resonate with me: The growing and processing of food, the huge impact it has on the economy isn't lost on anybody who grows up there." There are more row crops than orchards here, but Ash notes that the issues are the same. "The constant demand for improvement, both in product and the processes, is something that's always intriguing to me," he said.

The Midwestern work ethic, "which I relate to pretty closely," he says, is a constant within the companies he works with, as is the sense of commitment he shares with their cause. "Whether they are growers, processors or manufacturers, they are people who have sense of

what they do," he says. "I enjoy working with people in the industry, seeing how it operates, having opportunities to be involved in charitable aspects that so many are involved in because they 'get' that the world is hungry."

