

Stern & Kilcullen

Diverse Legal Backgrounds Combine to Create Successful Small Firm



Judge Herbert J. Stern
and Kevin Kilcullen

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—Kevin Kilcullen

When Judge Herbert J. Stern stepped down from the Federal bench, he entered private practice and opened a firm specializing in litigation. In 1990, when he needed help with his own tax and estate planning, Stern had to look outside his firm for that expertise. He looked at the talent around town and eventually hired Kevin Kilcullen as his personal tax attorney.

Impressed with Kilcullen's work, Stern eventually asked him to join his firm in 2000 and expand its focus beyond litigation to include tax and related business transactions, as well as trusts and estates. It was at that same time that Kilcullen was involved in the management of a large regional law firm, and wanted to spend less time on management and more time on the practice. "I'd seen the firm's financials

over the years during the estate planning process," says Kilcullen, "and saw how efficiently a boutique firm of specialists could be run. It was the easiest decision I'd ever made." Despite the differences in their legal backgrounds, or maybe because of those differences, Stern & Kilcullen is still thriving 14 years later.

The boutique firm specializes in civil litigation, criminal defense, taxation, estate planning, business planning and transactions, real estate structuring, and legislative and regulatory matters. "Our different backgrounds balance in our favor in a small firm like this," says Stern. "We have a synergism that just works."

Nimble and Efficient

"We know what we can do and we do it well. What we don't do is try

to be all things to all people," adds Stern. "When a client comes to us with an issue that's not really in our wheelhouse, we're not shy about admitting it. We'll utilize our relationships with other firms to get that client what they need. When a law firm refers a client to us to handle a specific problem, we send that client back when the problem is resolved."

According to Kilcullen, the secret to the firm's success is being comfortable with who it is. "We're a smaller firm on purpose. It allows us to give abundant attention to each client, to really analyze what each client needs and to figure out the best, most efficient way to realize that need," he says. "We can be nimble and flexible without having to worry about cumbersome layers of staff, all racking up billable hours at different rates."

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