



The Lawyer with Many Hats: Ari Kaplan

[By Mary Waldron]

Attorney, teacher, journalist, writer, commentator, filmmaker, businessman...could he possibly find any other way to diversify his career? Ari Kaplan is one attorney who, after nine years of practicing, decided it was time to live. And, boy, did he—professionally, that is.

Kaplan has taken his legal education and writing background and explored numerous other fields that interest him. Many of his interests have stemmed from his writing projects and the connections he has made throughout his career. Now he's on a mission to spread the word that other attorneys can easily do the same and be successful at it, too.

Growing up in Brooklyn, Kaplan always found himself interested in community issues and the betterment of society.

"I always felt that being a lawyer would help me work to that end. I always thought about going to law school," he said.

Kaplan studied economics and political science at Boston University before he moved on to The George Washington University Law School, where he served as a chief mediator for the University Mediators and managing editor for the law school's newspaper, *Nota Bene*. During his second summer in law school, Kaplan was hired as a legal assistant for the U.S. Department of State's Office of Foreign Missions. There, Kaplan gained early firsthand experience in the legal field by immersing himself in the department's meetings, negotiations, and hearings that concerned U.S. diplomatic missions and staff abroad. He continued in this job throughout law school.

An avid traveler and aficionado of international law, Kaplan was lucky enough to make a connection with an attorney who was from a firm that did international work.

He was hired by Siegel, Mandell & Davidson in New York City, where he focused on customs and international trade law. After his first year with the firm, it branched out to join another firm, Graham & James, and he followed.

Two years later, in 2000, Kaplan moved on to McDermott, Will & Emery, also in New York City. He stayed there for six years, focusing more on technology transactions until he made his most recent career leap.

"I spent almost nine years working with large law firms in New York City and simultaneously lived, in many ways, a writing career. I published 125 or so articles while practicing, so at one point, I had to make a

choice: do I want to continue practicing, or do I want to take the road less traveled?" said Kaplan.

Kaplan chose the road less traveled.

"I just decided, 'If I don't try now, I'll never be able to try.' You get to a point where it won't be so easy," he continued.

Since he ventured into his new twist on a legal career, Kaplan has continued to write for various legal and business publications. He recently received the APEX Award for Feature Writing last July for an article he wrote called "How to Stand Out from the Crowd" for *Small Firm Business* magazine.

Kaplan also began to dabble in other areas. He combined his love for the law, writing, speaking, and teaching (he taught Internet law for three years at Baruch College, as well as English in a couple of foreign countries) to launch his program "Getting Published" for personal and business development for companies and firms. This program explains how professionals can publish written work to enhance their careers.

Last year, Kaplan picked up the phone and called various bar associations throughout the U.S. to offer them his presentation, "and everyone was interested," he said. Once his presentation booking began to gain some momentum, Kaplan began to approach law firms, which also received him well. Since then, Kaplan has traveled all over the world, sharing his seminar with some of the most well-known law firms and legal associations.

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. I'm on a masters swimming team. I have two children. I like sharing ideas with them. There's something remarkable about having a conversation with a young child; it's so genuine. It's a very honest exchange, and I'm inspired by them. I like to hang out with my family and my extraordinary wife.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. I listen to this classical guitarist named Christopher Parkening; he's extraordinary. It helps me write and organize my thoughts.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. I'm a religious reader of *Crain's New York Business*.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *Heroes*.



This past summer, the New York State CLE Board accredited Kaplan's presentation for a half hour of ethics credit.

"I like to share with people who are like me ways to enhance their practices. I've actually billed 2,400 hours; I recognize all the pressures of being a lawyer—especially in a large law firm," Kaplan said of his ability to connect with lawyers.

While he was busy presenting throughout the country, Kaplan also began to dip his toes into the entertainment industry. He wrote an article for *GW Magazine*, George Washington University's alumni magazine, which discussed the school's connection to the situation in Guantanamo Bay.

"I interviewed all these lawyers who'd represented detainees at the camp in Cuba, and every story was more inspiring than the one I'd just heard. It was so intriguing," he said. "I was really proud to be a lawyer after speaking with these individuals."



Kaplan wanted to share how remarkable these attorneys were with the world, so he began filming the interviews to document the accounts. Kaplan planned to launch a video blog with this footage, and when he had gathered about eight 30- to 45-minute

interviews, he created a trailer and shared it with a small audience.

"A lot of people started to see the trailer and say, 'You know, Ari, you really shouldn't waste these videos and this message on just a video blog,'" he said.

After some consideration and investigation, Kaplan teamed up with a filmmaker to prepare and drive the film in the right direction for production and success. Now that the Guantanamo Bay issue has gotten more attention, the timing of this project seems to be right on target.

"I don't want to turn this into some politicized thing. My goal is to talk about the lawyers—the legal work—and celebrate what they've done and move on," Kaplan said.

The film is tentatively titled *Like Snowflakes in December*, which references a comment that Donald Rumsfeld made regarding the leaflets that were being dropped on Afghanistan right after 9/11: "It looks like snowflakes in December in Chicago."

Kaplan also recently finished the draft of a creative marketing book for law students and young attorneys. Last year, he wrote an article on rainmaking for *ABA Student Lawyer* magazine, which sparked his idea to write a book about the subject. Thomson West showed interest in the idea, and it's currently in the works.

In addition, Kaplan has been wearing a business hat for the last year. In September

2006, he was approached by a long-time contact and invited to become the CEO of his startup company, Dulcinea Media, Inc. Because of his hectic professional life, Kaplan was only able to accept the position part-time, and he has been working for the company for the last year. Currently, he focuses all of his efforts at the now-25-person company on its marketing strategy development and growth, as well as getting the company's writers published.

Kaplan now bases his career on encouraging lawyers to break out of the stereotypical lawyer mold to enrich their professional lives. As someone who took this plunge himself, Kaplan is a very reliable source.

"I feel that there's a lot of opportunity as a former lawyer," said Kaplan. "People should take the time to explore who they are and what they want. Lawyers, as a group—and I include myself in this group—are more risk averse than in other professions. There is a certain risk in saying, 'I know I make this six-figure salary, but I really want to do this.'"

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