

## INNOVATOR

### Lance Kaplan: ‘Be Open to Anticipating a Very Different Future in Our Industry’

“Legal leaders have to be open to anticipating a very different future in our industry, which historically has built significant barriers to entry. Technology and business diversification within professional services more broadly will impact the profession’s ongoing ability to continue to retain these historic barriers.”

By ALM Staff

*Lance Kaplan, managing partner of the international practice group at Fragomen, Del Rey, Bernsen & Loewy, is a Law Journal Innovators winner. The below responses were lightly edited for style and clarity.*

**What are some of your proudest achievements in 2020?**

Last year, by radically adapting our business processes as the pandemic evolved in unpredictable ways, I played a key role in helping ensure that Fragomen remained the leading immigration firm in the world.

To do that, we leveraged our scale as a global firm to collect and act on every piece of data about how different countries were adjusting their immigration policies in response to the pandemic, often on a daily basis, and then share

that information across our 4,200+ employees and with clients and the wider market.

***Innovation often refers to technology, but means more than that. What are some routes to effective innovation that might be overlooked?***

In terms of immigration processes, the United States lags in digitization. U.S. immigration agencies still require enormous volumes of paper to approve a petition. By contrast, in many other countries, digitization was accelerated as a result of COVID-19. Notwithstanding this digitization, the role of the firm and our professional staff remains constant. Exercising sound legal judgment is core to the success



Lance Kaplan, with Fragomen, Del Rey, Bernsen & Loewy.

Courtesy photo

of our clients, i.e., understanding who will secure approval in the first place, and why—the most important part of our work.

In addition, COVID led to the creation of new visa types in many

countries. We're able to respond to clients' needs and the utility or applicability of these new visa regimes by embracing digitization and creating assessment tools to help clients quickly make smart decisions for their business.

So it's less about a technology, and more about the intersection of knowledge and technology. The faster the ability to ingest and interpret changing rules and regulations, the better the ability to deftly handle the law when it inevitably evolves.

***What must the leaders of law firms and other organizations do to ensure they are being receptive to new ideas, and to improve the legal profession's reputation for being innovative?***

It's simple: Assume that the way you do things today is not the way

you're going to need to do them tomorrow.

When I first started practicing immigration law in the early 1990's, my practice was all about people coming to the U.S. It occurred to me that as the world globalized, our discipline was going to be about fostering immigration among all countries. 20 years later, that is indeed the situation. But now, with worldwide migration increasing (notwithstanding COVID-19), the challenge is the increasing inconsistency between jurisdictions and the pace at which change needs to be communicated to client stakeholders and employees, as well as government agencies.

Legal leaders have to be open to anticipating a very different future

in our industry, which historically has built significant barriers to entry. Technology and business diversification within professional services more broadly will impact the profession's ongoing ability to continue to retain these historic barriers. Legal leaders should not, however, fear a lesser need for substantive legal advice, but they should be prepared to contemplate alternate methodologies of how the legal environment interacts with clients and focus on utilizing knowledge and technology to improve lawyers' output. Many lawyers might bristle at the intrusion of technology, but I say you embrace it and figure out a way to offer value alongside it, to innovate along with it. And that's how my fellow partners are approaching it too.