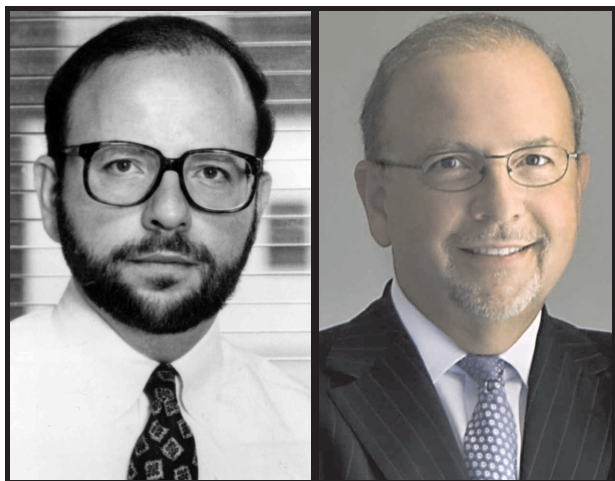


Peter J. Kalis, K&L Gates

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PETER J. KALIS, CIRCA 1978 AND NOW

In 1980, when I started law practice, the Pittsburgh Pirates were the reigning World Series champions; apple was my choice of fruit, not the world's largest corporation by market capitalization; I typed on an IBM Selectric typewriter; Jimmy Carter was president; and the best-selling single was "Don't Stand So Close to Me" by The Police.

It also took 10 man-hours to fashion a ton of finished steel. Three decades later, it takes two person-hours to accomplish the same task. That's not because all of those new female steelworkers are five times as strong.

Things change. Industries innovate. But when law innovates and changes, there is inevitably a call for a return to the good old days. The old days were indeed good. I was there for many of them. These days, however, are great. Happily, I'm still here to enjoy them. Law is a special calling.

Some traditionalists are apparently annoyed that law has become an industry, as if this is at odds with its status as a profession. These people don't get it. The legal industry is a series of concentric circles, the innermost of which is the traditional profession. As you work outward through the concentric circles, you encounter law schools, law firms, law departments, professional associations, bankers, legal publications, legal consultants, legal process outsourcers, technology vendors and the like. This enormous infrastructure is all leveraged off that innermost circle — the pure profession.

I've practiced in the same firm for nearly 32 years. When I arrived, I was the 80th lawyer in Pittsburgh's fifth-largest law firm. It was a single-office firm because that's all you needed. But soon the realization dawned that our clients were doing business in different ways and places, and we and other firms had to align our businesses with the businesses of clients and potential clients to serve them seamlessly across the country and eventually around the world. We now have nearly 2,000 lawyers in 41 offices on four continents.

Today, a law firm must reside at the critical crossroads of the 21st century — at the intersection of globalization, regulation and innovation. That's different from 1980, of course, but in the good old days client service dictated law firm positioning just as it does now. Clients' businesses have changed, and law firms have adapted.

There seems to be an obsession in some quarters with "new" developments within the profession that in fact aren't so new. Client pushback on fees? Please. Go back in time to the Pittsburgh of the early 1980s, and I'll show you client pushback on fees. Disenchantment of associates? As an associate, I was awarded a beer mug with a wild bird motif because some misguided souls (we called them "partners") maintained that I "groused" about everything. Lack of mentoring? Actually, with the erosion of pyramidal structures in most law firms, mentoring relationships and one-on-one staffing with junior and senior lawyers abound. Turning our back on our civic mission as lawyers? My guess is that the Am Law 100 firms donate about \$2 billion in pro bono and other community services each year. Our lawyers serve our communities and our profession in a multitude of ways, as they did in 1980.

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.