



A Law Firm Grows on Charles Street

by ANNE MARIE BOWLER
with SARI GABAY-RAFIY

Whether we like to admit it or not, most of us spend the majority of our day at work. Even if we try to add other enjoyable activities in the mix - exercise, dinner with friends, time with family - work occupies the vast majority of our awake hours. This isn't such a profound realization in itself, but when coupled with the question - is this how I want to spend the majority of my day? - and acting on the answer, that's profound, and exciting. And that's the story of the beginning of our law firm, Gabay-Rafiy & Bowler LLP.

Sari and I met at Proskauer Rose LLP, a renowned international law firm, where we worked as litigation associates in an environment typical of most big firms in New York City. We worked on exciting in-the-news cases, worked alongside intelligent and creative attorneys, and billed many, many hours.

From our start at Proskauer in 2000, fresh out of Brooklyn Law School, we immediately bonded over our experiences and anxieties - reviewing boxes of corporate documents in windowless conference rooms trying to find the "smoking gun," furiously taking notes as the firm's partners delegated assignments to be completed before the days end (which often translated to after sunrise the next morning), triple-checking that every "i" was dotted and every "t" crossed, searching and searching for the perfect legal opinion to hang our hat on, and above all, ensuring that the absolute best product was presented to the court and client, with no mistakes - of course.

Proskauer was an excellent start to our legal careers. We learned more than we've yet to even realize from the best, and were exposed to the gamut of interesting and high profile cases. Our training there made us the creative, diligent



Anne Marie Bowler and Sari Gabay-Rafiy decided to leave big law firm life to find passion in their client's cases and balance in their lives

and careful attorneys we are today, six plus years later.

Work days passed so quickly though; many into the weekend. And soon, before we even realized it, we were senior associates. Though senior, it was still difficult to gain entry into the upper tier of responsibility, like hands-on contact with clients, leadership on cases and the authority to make the decision. Of course, this is to be expected on cases where the client risks losing billions of dollars or its livelihood. But were we willing to accept that, we asked. Was this enough?

Sari and I were open to asking the questions because we had the benefit of perspective. Both of us had the opportunity to step away from the structure of a big law firm, big client, big stakes environment.

Sari left twice for maternity leave, and I took a leave to clerk for Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye, the Chief Judge of the State and New York's highest court, the Court of Appeals. During our time away from the firm, we had a chance to explore life and think about how we wanted to live our lives, and the majority of our awake hours. We wondered, was there an alternate way to practice law outside of a big firm and find balance in our lives?

Back at the firm, with the gift of perspective, we began to explore our options for balance, a work environment where we could find passion in our client's cases, choose our work and case load, implement strategies, and have control over our entire schedule. We kept returning to the

same option - our own law firm. We felt confident that we had the skill-set to do it so, why not?

There were many reasons "why not?" - money, job security, structure, prestige of large law firm practice and clients and exposure to complex legal issues. But after much thought and reflection, we decided that money and prestige were not enough to keep us tied to our desks.

In the Spring of 2006 we made a choice to live the majority of our awake hours on our own terms, at our own firm, Gabay-Rafiy & Bowler LLP. We took with us no clients or files, we only took the skills we developed and the relationships we had made. And just like that, we hung out our shingle in an open loft space in the heart of Soho,

conveniently within walking distance of each of our apartments.

Whenever we wondered if we would be able to make our next payments, we assured ourselves that if we built it, they would come. And they have come - our own field of dreams. We learn something new every single day. And each day we meet new challenges, from complex client issues to a broken printer and no in-house technical support. But at each challenge we feel a tremendous sense of accomplishment and fulfillment.

We wear many hats and often have many balls in the air, which keeps our days exciting. Above all, we have found a way to be successful, to be happy, and truly to be alive - personally and professionally. We enjoy meeting with our clients and learning about their businesses and we find the time to network and pursue other interests outside the law firm. In fact, I have been active volunteering with Habitat for Humanity, building houses in New Orleans, and Sari enjoys more time to spend with her children and participants in community activities.

Interestingly, we both have roots on Charles Street. Sari grew up on Charles Street and lived there for 26 years with her family, the Gabays. I have lived on Charles Street for four years. We are excited about contributing to our West Village community with our upcoming monthly column, "Ask the lawyers," and look forward to responding to your submissions.

GABAY-RAFIY & BOWLER LLP attorneys at law

Sari Gabay-Rafiy Anne Marie Bowler

A General Practice Law Firm

584 Broadway, Suite 507
New York City 10012
212.941.5025 (tel)
212.202.3883 (fax)

www.gabaybowler.com
gabay@gabaybowler.com
bowler@gabaybowler.com

Sevilla Restaurant & Bar Authentic Spanish Cuisine

62 Charles Street Corner of
West 4th Street

(212) 222-2122