

Alan Greenfield

One Goal: To Lead the Top-Ranked Global Franchise Law Practice

by Dustin J. Seibert

Alan R. Greenfield must burn the candle at both ends to practice law at the level he does.

His travel schedule is reminiscent of George Clooney's character in the movie *Up in the Air*. Greenfield has already accumulated over 175,000 flight miles in 2016 alone, traveling throughout the United States and to such locations as Dubai, Buenos Aires, Mexico City and Vancouver.

Greenfield needs to manage clients all over the world, so sleep comes at a premium. He communicates with clients in the Middle East and Far East Asia during the wee hours of the morning and during the late hours of the night.

The 9-to-5 office grind doesn't exist for him. You may or may not catch him in the actual Chicago office of the global firm **Greenberg Traurig LLP**. As a leader of the firm's franchise and distribution practice, he wouldn't have it any other way. In fact, he desires even more.



"I want the top-ranked global franchise practice," he says. "It is also important to me to develop a strong next-generation associate base we can trust to undertake responsibility and continue the legacy we are creating at Greenberg Traurig."

Christine Johnson, general counsel for Dallas-based Dickey's Barbecue Restaurants, Inc., says Greenfield is on his way to creating a singular franchise practice thanks to his acumen in a field that not many lawyers are familiar with.

"There are a lot of attorneys who dabble in a lot of different areas, but Alan is really focused and has such great knowledge about franchising and distribution," she says.

"He's such an expert in the area, and he can answer almost any question I ever have off the cuff. It's amazing that he's operating at that level."

The Family Business

Greenfield hails from a family of attorneys based in South Florida. His father has practiced law in Miami for over 60 years and currently works primarily in the real estate and corporate areas. The elder Greenfield influenced all three of his children, including Greenfield, to become lawyers.

"My sister, brother and I all saw my father's passion for the profession and were excited about it. It's why he's still doing it today — for the love of the law and the mental challenge," Greenfield says. "We just all thought it was a natural next step based on what he did."

Greenfield went to play baseball in college at Flagler College in St. Augustine, Florida, before injuring his shoulder and transferring after his first year to the University of Central Florida. He then followed the trend of his father and sister by enrolling in the University of Miami School of Law.

Even though he attended law school, Greenfield had his eyes set on becoming a real estate developer once he finished.

"I experienced the real estate boom in Miami in the late '90s and early 2000s, and was intrigued by the possibility of developing projects and leaving my mark in the industry," he says. "I saw law school as a means to help me succeed in that field."

His first year of practicing law was enough to shift his focus from becoming a real estate mogul to practicing corporate law, discovering his true passion for assisting entrepreneurs and companies in successfully

executing business strategies. He practiced in West Palm Beach, Florida, with Broad and Cassel for two years before making the move to a multinational firm in Chicago.

“I decided I needed to undertake the challenge of working at an international law firm in a larger legal market,” he says. “Plus, I figured if it didn’t work out, what’s the downside of moving back to Miami?”

Practicing law didn’t have an effect on Greenfield’s plan to become an entrepreneur. Just a few years ago, he and a few friends were making plans to start their own franchise company when the opportunity to start a franchise practice at an international law firm with more than 1,900 attorneys presented itself.

Though the opportunity to develop a franchise practice at Greenberg Traurig was enough to postpone that endeavor, he’s able to scratch that entrepreneurial itch through helping his clients grow their own businesses while continuing to expand the franchise practice at Greenberg Traurig.

“I feel that, through helping my clients grow their businesses, I am fulfilling an entrepreneurial desire,” he admits.

Adiya Dixon, director of international counsel for The Wendy’s Company, hired Greenfield for a project at the end of 2013 and still utilizes him frequently.

“He is tremendously creative and comes up with interesting, business-friendly solutions to a myriad of problems,” Dixon says.

“He is also very accessible. I can locate him whenever I need to, and his turnaround time is extremely fast and his delivery always perfect.”

Understanding the Business

Greenfield is one of a small number of attorneys across the country with a practice dedicated to franchise and distribution law. He represents companies of all sizes, from start-up franchise companies that need assistance with preparing and registering a Franchise Disclosure Document in order to sell franchises, to some of the world’s largest companies who utilize the franchise or distribution model to operate in the U.S. or abroad.

“I am frequently asked about the types of companies with whom I work given my extensive travel schedule. The way I typically describe my international practice is that in addition to some of the mature franchise brands with extensive international operations who are constantly expanding to new markets, there are a lot of companies in the U.S. that don’t want to franchise in the U.S. because they’re committed to operating company-owned locations in their home market; however, they choose

to take advantage of the franchise model to expand abroad,” he says.

“Much of what I do is helping franchise or retail companies establish an international expansion plan, typically through a franchise or joint venture model, and execute on that plan,” he says.

Greenfield didn’t originally seek out the franchise and distribution practice. It wasn’t until his move to Chicago in 2006 to join the multinational firm DLA Piper that he began to focus on franchising and distribution.

“After talking to attorneys I looked up to in Florida, they thought specialization was the way to go,” he says.

Greenfield was at DLA Piper for almost six years when a Greenberg Traurig attorney who was a former partner at DLA Piper reached out to him.

“I was told that I really needed to meet Keith Shapiro, a founder of Greenberg Traurig’s Chicago office, because he was looking to hire a franchise group to join the firm,” Greenfield says.

“Keith promised me that he and the firm would support me and allow me to develop the practice. He wound up being a man of his word.”

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The hardest part about leaving DLA Piper, Greenfield says, was moving on from Dennis Wiczorek, his mentor and the head of that firm’s franchise and distribution practice.

“He was one of the most well-respected franchise practitioners in the industry,” Greenfield says of Wiczorek, who passed away in 2014. “I worked very closely with Dennis. He taught me not just how to practice franchise law, but the practical parts of the business. I had the utmost respect for Dennis.”

‘Well Beyond His Years’

Shapiro says Greenfield’s boyish appearance and relatively young age of 37 belies maturity well beyond his years.

“Large companies around the world come to Alan for critical advice,” Shapiro says. “It’s unusual for someone that young to be respected by companies on that level when they can have their pick of lawyers. Sometimes people are shocked that he can look as young as he does and still have such incredible confidence and sophistication.”

His appearance was a non-issue when, in

2009, Greenfield negotiated a three-party deal in Tokyo with a global oil company client for his client. He was at the head of a table in a conference room that he says “felt like it was a mile long.”

“On the first night, there must have been at least 20 senior partners in attendance from at least four firms at the table,” he says. “And there I am, leading the negotiation at age 30.”

Greenfield says they negotiated provisions for a week straight “with a nominal amount of sleep over the course of the week.”

“At the formal signing ceremony in front of the media, the CEO of the opposing company looked at my client and me and said, ‘You’re a very tough negotiator,’ at which point my client looked at me and said, ‘If I heard anything otherwise, I’d be upset,’” Greenfield recalls.

Shortly after, Greenfield went to Brazil to negotiate another deal for the client.

“On my first day in Rio, a vice president from the client who I hadn’t previously met looks at me on the first day and says, ‘No offense, but how old are you?’ I told him that I’ve heard it before. ‘Just let me do my thing, and I’ll show you why I was sent here.’ We’ve been friends ever since.”

Eye on the Future

In the four short years since making the move to Greenberg Traurig, Greenfield, along with his partner, David Oppenheim, have received a number of accolades on both an individual and practice group level.

Most recently, Greenfield and Oppenheim, as well as Greenberg Traurig’s franchise and distribution practice, achieved national rankings in *Chambers USA*. The accolade brings Greenfield another step closer to his goal of developing the top-ranked global franchise practice.

Christine Johnson, of Dickey’s Barbecue Restaurants, Inc., met Greenfield during a networking event several years ago and initially hired him to assist with an employment matter in 2013. He now handles the bulk of Dickey’s franchise transactional and litigation work.

Johnson jokes with Greenfield by calling him a “new-style attorney,” in that he doesn’t operate like the stereotypical older, stuffy lawyer.

“He won’t insult me by telling me he knows what’s best,” Johnson says. “He’s responsive to our business needs and appreciates the pace at which we move. He’s also so responsive and helpful in meeting our business needs and objectives, it’s almost like I don’t feel like I’m getting his advice so much as he’s a collaborator.”

That Tokyo transaction is just one

of a number of examples in which the trim, youthful Greenfield has benefited from being underestimated. But that underestimation has existed most of his life. He's been a team leader, sports captain and All-State athlete since his teen years.

"I work hard to develop relationships with people, and more importantly, to treat others as I wish to be treated," he says. "I didn't seek it out; it's always been inherent in what I do. I feel I've earned that respect and trust, but I've also been fortunate to inherit my father's passion for the practice of law and work for partners who allowed me to grow as I rose in the ranks.

"I'm mindful that not many attorneys have the experiences that I did so early in my career, so it is important for me to learn from them and not to let those experiences go to waste."

As Greenfield builds his practice, he always remembers to operate in the vein of his mentor Wieczorek, his father, and the other partners he's looked up to in his 12 years of practice.

"I always want to be thought of as a great attorney, a practical businessperson, and a good, kind person," Greenfield says.

David Oppenheim has known Greenfield since they were competitors during Greenfield's DLA Piper days. He says Greenfield's tireless, 24-7 dedication to his clients distinguishes him from his peers in the franchising field.

"In this business, success means treating your clients' problems like they are your own, morning, noon and night," Oppenheim says. "Clients appreciate that Alan is always accessible. When he's dealing with large companies with inside counsel, he always makes them look good."

Above everything else he has or will accomplish in his career, Greenfield still makes the time for family — his wife, Staci, and children Alexa, 5, and Juliana, 2.

"I try to work from home when possible. And every Friday, I try to make it home for dinner, no matter what," he says.

"While I greatly appreciate all that I have accomplished in my legal career, my family is, without a doubt, most important to me. I could not have made the move to Greenberg Traurig and done any of this without the support of my wife.

"Above all else, I want my wife and children to be proud of me as a husband and father and to have great memories of us together." ■