

## Law Firm Leaders: Tarter Krinsky & Drogin's Alan Tarter

By Aebra Coe

*Law360 (January 30, 2019, 1:16 PM EST)* -- Under Alan Tarter's leadership, midsize New York law firm Tarter Krinsky & Drogin LLP has grown from six attorneys to 80 during its 18-year existence.

Tarter is a founding partner and has served as the full-service law firm's managing partner since it was founded in 2001. Here, he chats with Law360 about the business and practice of law.

### What one trait is most important for a law firm partner?

I think passion. I think that if an attorney is passionate about what they do — if they really love the law, enjoy working with clients — they're going to be successful. That's the key attribute we look for.

### What's the biggest mistake attorneys make early on in their careers?

New attorneys are, a lot of times, afraid to ask questions. I think it's so key to ask questions and learn the foundational basics of their area of law. One of the wonderful things about practicing law is we always get to learn new things every single day. The attorneys that embrace that challenge — they're not always going to know the answers and they need to research and learn — they're going to build a magnificent foundation for their practice that will benefit the clients and that will benefit the attorney and the firm, in terms of the business they generate as a result of having a strong foundation to support and service clients' needs.

### What's one thing your law firm does that is unique?

We have this GOAL program, which is an acronym for Go Out and Learn and Lead. It's a program where we give every team member the opportunity to select a goal for the year and the firm will then support that goal. The goal can be professional or personal, but it has to make them better at work in some way. We've had a bunch of amazing goals and we've had people grow and succeed in their goals.

One of our litigators wanted to be better standing up in court. She identified that an improvisational comedy program would help her with that, so she took a class on improv. We then had several attorneys follow that. One of our paralegals wanted to become a certified fraud examiner, which is a certification



Alan Tarter  
Tarter Krinsky &  
Drogin

some forensic accountants get. We put her through that course and she took an exam. I think we had four or five attorneys follow her. That has been helpful in the practice. She's a labor and employment, wage-and-hour paralegal, and it's been very helpful in terms of what she does in her job. We've had several people who have wanted to learn languages and have learned foreign languages.

I think these opportunities to grow, outside of the traditional CLE and programs that law firms offer, are really a good thing. I think it helps with engagement and it helps folks grow.

**What are some of the biggest challenges that law firms your size are facing right now?**

Maintaining [our] pricing structure is key because it's a competitive advantage.

**How is your pricing structure different from large law firms and how are you able to maintain it?**

We're typically 35 or 40 percent less than the larger firms, in terms of our rate structure. The way to maintain the rate structure is through your overhead structure. We're a midsize firm, we're targeted primarily on middle-market companies and then doing specialized work for larger companies. And we have to, in turn, maintain a right-sized infrastructure. We're really careful with capital expenditures, real estate costs, and we really try to right-size it so we're able to maintain a cost structure that allows us to maintain that rate structure.

**What can law firms do now to be poised for success should another recession hit?**

I believe what law firms want to do is create diversification in their practices so if a recession hits, it may only hit some of your practices, as opposed to all of your practices. You may have practices that are countercyclical. We're a full-service firm. If a recession hits, we have practices that may be hit harder than others, but we have other practices that would naturally see an increase in work, like bankruptcy and perhaps employment and litigation. Again, I think another protection against a recession is to constantly keep providing good service and be out there generating and increasing business. I also believe that engagement is key — the more engaged your team members are, the more productive they're going to be, even in the face of a recession.

**Where do you see your law firm in five years?**

Our goal is to become a better, more evolved version of who we are.

**Do you see growth as a part of that?**

Absolutely. I think that with growth comes opportunity. We've had dramatic growth. We're only 17 years old and we've experienced growth every year. That's been an important part of our success, but it's also been measured. We're not interested in becoming something we're not. We're not interested in becoming a BigLaw firm. Our goal is to become the best midsize law firm. We will continue to grow unless and until we feel that our expense structure is not growing proportionately to our revenue growth.

**What well-known lawyer, alive or dead, would you most like to have lunch with and why?**

Bill Clinton, just because I think it would be a very interesting lunch.

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