

## EXECUTIVE PROFILE

### 'I needed to be where the action is'

JEFFREY M. OSTROW ON THE JOURNEY FROM EXECUTIVE SUITE TO LAS OLAS



**Jeffrey M. Ostrow started his business by going door-to-door, offering to do legal work.**

JOCK FISTICK

**J**effrey M. Ostrow is the founder and named partner of Kopelowitz Ostrow Ferguson Weiselberg Gilbert, a full-service law firm based in a downtown Fort Lauderdale building Ostrow built for the firm. Next door is Tilted Kilt, a restaurant Ostrow is a partner in, and on the ground floor of the KO Lawyers building is the soon-to-be-opened TRP Taste, a restaurant concept from the creators of Yolo.

Ostrow is not your typical lawyer. He started building KO when he was 26, going door-to-door in his office building and accepting any type of legal work he could find. But that's how you build a strong, steady practice, he says: by working as hard as possible until your name is on a building and lawyers from blue-chip firms are knocking on the door, seeking a job. Now, he's added a sports agent arm to his businesses, and in his downtime runs the Jorge Nation Foundation, which awards vacations to children with serious illnesses.

**How did you get to South Florida?** We moved to West Kendall when I was 5 from Huntington, Long Island. My mother and stepfather moved down here for business. My stepfather's dad owned a clothing store for older

## JEFFREY M. OSTROW

**Age:** 44

**Birthplace:** New York

**Residence:** Davie

**Current position:** Managing partner, Kopelowitz Ostrow Ferguson Weiselberg and Gilbert; president, ProPlayer Sports LLC

**Current boards:** Jorge Nation Foundation, Nova Southeastern University Business School

**Past board:** Sterling Bank

**Education:** J.D., Nova Southeastern University; B.S.B.A., University of Florida

women on Lincoln Road. My dad ended up taking it over and renting it. He did have the opportunity to buy it, but at that time, nobody wanted to buy there.

**Did you stay in Miami?** When my sisters graduated from high school, we moved. ... I went to high school in Boca Raton, went to University of Florida for college. When I graduated, I didn't know what I wanted to do, but I had a sister that was an attorney. I went to law school because it was a tool in my bag that I would always have.

**What was your first job out of college?**

I was offered a job at a huge company that set workers' compensation rates, and I was working there before passing the bar, watching legal work come in from subcontractors. I realized that I didn't want to work as an in-house counsel for a firm where I wasn't doing any legal work. ... After I passed the bar, I realized I was the type of person who was more of a leader than a follower.

**Why did you decide to start your own firm?** I had worked at a couple firms during law school, and I knew that I didn't want to work for someone else. I may not have been as smart or as good

as another lawyer that has the training, but I would get there and I wanted to get there myself. I went to Hollywood Boulevard, to an executive suite I found in the Yellow Pages. I went to the owner and offered to, instead of rent, do double the value in legal work for him. We shook hands, and that was it.

**How did you build your business?**

I went to everyone I knew and their mother and said: "Somebody is charging you \$1,000 to write a letter? I'll do it for \$25." And then I went door to door in the building, offering to do work. There was a Canadian guy who was a lawyer in Canada, but a paralegal here because he wasn't a U.S. lawyer. I started getting odds-and-ends work from him. There was an accountant who still sends me his clients today, and he asked me if I did personal injury work. I said absolutely, I do everything. It turned out he had chipped his tooth eating something. I didn't know exactly what to do, but I knew how to write a demand letter. A couple weeks later, I had made him a couple thousand dollars and taken a commission.

**KO is a relatively large firm now. How did you get here?**

As soon as I made some money, I wanted to be on Las Olas Boulevard. I knew that if I wanted to do work, I needed to be where the action is. I needed to see my clients out at lunch, I needed to be near the courthouse. I still want to be in the middle of it all. Look what I built. Six months after Hollywood, I came to Las Olas.

**How did you keep growing the firm?**

I took every job. I talked to friends from law school, I met a builder and told him to pay me \$100 to do all his legal work. I realized something early on: I took everything. I did divorces, some crazy stuff. I realized that my model was charging people hourly, a flat fee and contingency. That is the way to practice, the hourly flat-fee stuff is how you pay the salaries, contingencies are how you bonus your life.

**What advice do you have for young entrepreneurs?**

My advice to anyone who wants to start their own business is: Start your own business. Don't worry about the rest. If it doesn't work, try again. If you're the type of person who should be starting your own business, if you fail, you'll try again.

— Nina Lincoff