

Rita Sostrin

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Biography

Rita Sostrin was born in the former Soviet Union and her family immigrated to the USA in 1988. Prior to obtaining her law degree, she earned an undergraduate degree in international relations. Rita has been working in immigration law for nearly 25 years, starting at a small but high-level practice. Since 2010, she has been running her own firm with Alex Dgebuadze, focusing on employment-based immigration law.

What attracted you to a career in corporate immigration?

As an immigrant, I have long appreciated the tremendous ideals and opportunities that America embodies. After we moved here, my parents' circle of friends consisted primarily of bright, educated immigrants who devoted their unbounded drive and intellect to advancing their respective fields here. I was attracted to the prospect of helping such individuals come to the USA and advancing our nation in countless ways as they pursued the American Dream.

What do you enjoy most about working in the field?

Every day, I work with the world's best and brightest who represent a wide variety of fields, from arts, business and entertainment to healthcare, academia and high-tech. It is incredibly reaffirming to learn about my clients' groundbreaking work, and it is a great honour to be part of their American journey. It is tremendously fulfilling to be making a difference in the lives of exceptionally gifted individuals, and the wellbeing of our nation.

What did you find challenging about entering the market?

The US job market in the 1990s was more competitive than it is today. I was fortunate that a nationally respected immigration lawyer gave me my first job. It took time to establish my reputation, and by extension, my clientele. While the field of immigration law is relatively small compared to other legal areas, that didn't make it any easier given the dynamics of the profession. In addition to servicing my clients, I focused on writing articles, speaking at conferences, and volunteering for national committees in order to establish a name for myself.

How has the area developed since you first began practising?

The field of immigration law has long struggled with a conundrum: while the USA has grown and the need for foreign talent has increased commensurately with it, we are still operating under the same quotas for certain visa classifications. Complicating this environment are the increasing restrictions on immigrants. Cases that would have received relatively easy approvals several years ago are now routinely challenged. The atmosphere has become more contentious, and nearly every case is a battle.

How would you analyse the government's current approach to the "individuals with extraordinary ability" visa in the USA?

The government has become too restrictive on visas for individuals with extraordinary ability. This is an area of immigration law that allows some subjectivity to an adjudicating officer, and we have seen a definite negative swing. America is a nation that continues to make great strides because of immigrants. A recent study revealed that nearly half of all Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or the children of immigrants. Such individuals clearly bring unique drive and energy to advancing our nation's entrepreneurial spirit and economic security. When we deny them a future here, we do so at our own peril.

Why did you decide to set up your own firm?

There is a time when individuals reach a point in their careers where they can either plateau or persevere – complacency is the first and last refuge of the status quo. I had

stopped growing at my previous firm, and I recognised that I needed greater challenges if I was to be able to provide greater service and support to my clients. I was grateful for the experience I gained there, but it was time to move on. It was daunting in the beginning, but I never regretted my decision to start this new chapter of my career as a lawyer-entrepreneur.

What are your main priorities for the firm's development over the next five years?

Given the more combative atmosphere in immigration law today, we've noticed a sharp uptick in companies reaching out to us to support their in-house legal teams' efforts to navigate this new evolving environment. This is an area in which we know we can offer competitive value to our clients, and one we hope to continue growing in the coming years. We will also continue to develop innovative approaches to legal analysis and casework that best align with successful outcomes for our clients.

Where, in your opinion, does the future of the practice area lie?

This is difficult to predict, because the question hinges – to some extent – on who's in power and on whether immigration reform happens and in what form. The reality is that when it comes to immigration, both main political parties have it partially right, and both parties have it partially wrong. There must be room for compromise, because the stakes are simply too high if the USA is to continue leading the world in science, technology, medicine and entertainment.