
Partner David Gammell: Bet on the Team, Not the Idea

JANUARY 7, 2015

Boston-based Partner [David Gammell](#) knows what it takes to start a business. As an attorney with nearly two decades of experience working with emerging technology companies and venture capital firms, he says, "I've seen the startup movie more than a few times. It's a personal drama: 'We're starting a company. We've got a diverse group of talented people, and we're trying to get from point A to point Z.'"

Gammell, who joined WilmerHale's Emerging Company Practice in April 2013, has clients innovating in areas as diverse as skin grafting, oil and gas exploration, and web-based payment platforms. Until recently, the list included cloud software startup Stackdriver, which Gammell guided through its entire lifecycle, from forming the company in 2012 to obtaining patents and completing financings to, finally, leading its sale to Google in May 2014.

But, Gammell says, it's the people, not the deals or the inventions, that drive his practice. "Because my job is to help startups grow their business, it's about helping people navigate relationships," he explains. "At the end of the day, most businesses hinge on the ever-changing dynamics of people working together."

Relationships are also essential when he is evaluating potential new business: "I'd bet on a team every time. It's more important than technology. A great deal of execution is required to bring a business to fruition-execution requires people."

Gammell began his professional life as a nuclear engineer in the US Navy. A Nebraska native, he joined the nuclear submarine force after graduating with an engineering degree from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. He then worked for an engineering firm in Boston, but decided to leave the nuclear industry-which "was waning and contracting dramatically"-to pursue a more dynamic and people-oriented career in law.

When he started practicing, he sought out emerging technology clients because of his interest in science and technology. He also saw an opportunity to differentiate himself: "Emerging company practice allowed me to make an individual contribution and build a brand." Now, Gammell says, "I'm very founder empathetic in what I do, probably because I've also created my own business."

Gammell says he spends an enormous amount of time bringing in new business, and adds that

his focus on "managing people and expectations and solving business problems" sets his practice apart in the marketplace. "My audience is all entrepreneurs," he says. "They know they need help, but they don't necessarily know how we can help."

"I like interacting with people," he continues. "A lot of attorneys love to crank out deals-I like the deals, but it's because I know the players, not because of the deal itself."