

Estate Planning

MATT SPAHN

The Spahn Law Firm PLLC
Attorney and President



By Susan A. Merkner

Matt Spahn's resume, which includes his strengths and achievements alongside his education and experience, includes a phrase not often encountered on a professional's vita: "And then there were the chickens."

Spahn is quick to credit growing up on the family farm in Gonzales County with much of his professional success as an estate-planning attorney and president of the Spahn Law Firm.

"Taking care of all those dangd chickens," which numbered 80,000 one-day-old broilers at a time — as well as working cattle and roofing barns — helped him develop a strong work ethic and the desire to work in the air conditioning, he says.

"The horses were the best part of it all. Looking at cattle from horseback is one of the nicest things to do in the world."

Now Spahn is teaching leadership skills and the value of teamwork to his children on the family's acreage in Guadalupe County.

The ability to farm and ranch part time while holding down a professional position was part of the impetus that drove Spahn to attend Texas A&M University, where he earned degrees in history, English and political science,

and Baylor University School of Law.

Spahn approaches his estate-planning work for his clients with the attitude of a teacher. He also teaches the advanced estate-planning course at St. Mary's University law school.

"Clients come with a lot of baggage and may have perceptions about attorneys that aren't always favorable," he says. "They think we're going to be bossy and talk over their heads. But my attitude is: I work for you."

Estate planning is not as complicated and costly as some clients fear, although it logically conjures up thoughts about one's eventual death, he says. "Too many people avoid estate planning, thinking, 'I'll do it tomorrow,' but then mañana never comes."

Spahn considers himself part of a family's team of professionals, along with their accountants, financial advisors and physicians.

"Each client has a unique story, and I really get to know them as our discussions touch on all aspects of their lives. That helps me understand each person as an individual," he says.

"I want clients to have the total 'wow' experience, to understand that their plan can be changed any time they need it because it's a living plan," Spahn says. "I want to leave them with the impression that now they can handle anything that life throws their way."

Age: 45

Hometown: Gonzales

Family: Wife Lori; Two sons, ages 16 and 10, and one daughter, age 15

High school: Gonzales High School

First job ever: I grew up on a farm — ranch is the romantic term. You can spell farm: W-O-R-K. We raised 80,000 chickens and 60 cows. The work never stopped. In the summer we built things, like huge barns made entirely of iron that we had to drive nails through. I decided college might be a good thing if it led to working in air conditioning in the summer. I did love working the cattle and riding horses.

Higher Ed Degrees: Two bachelor degrees with three majors (English, history and political science) from Texas A&M University; J.D. from Baylor University School of Law.

Moment you realized you wanted to be a lawyer: I went to law school due to my intellectual curiosity, not because I knew I wanted to be a lawyer. There were no close friends or family members who were lawyers.

When did you hit your stride? Really, seven years ago when I founded the Spahn Law Firm and faithfully declared that all I would do is estate planning. Just estate planning. Really.

What makes your area of law interesting? It's constructive, positive; it's building a legacy of stewardship. It's so personal. I know my clients' life stories, their marriages, their kids, their successes and failures, their finances, their hopes, dreams . . . What other person in their lives knows as much as I do? I distill all that into a plan to protect their lives, their legacies, their hopes.

What gets you out of bed in the morning? The chance to teach estate planning to new clients. To take that burden off their backs and give them something concrete that they can count on.

What keeps you up at night? My wife.

Accomplishment most proud of: Being married for 18 years with three kids.

Biggest mistake or learning experience: There was a time when I really wanted nothing to do with the law, I wanted to leave the law, and nearly did. I was led back to the law to do what I was designed for — estate planning.

Mentor(s): No earthly ones, really.

How has technology changed your job: It is ever easier, faster and better to create plans, to keep up with changes in the law and ensure that the plans have the latest and greatest.

SUSAN A. MERKNER
is a San Antonio freelance writer.

