

Founding partner of Texas law firm believes in the personal approach



By Brian Cox

Attorney David Palmer likes “dealing with folks” and believes in the power of a phone call.

His preference for direct personal contact underscores the importance of relationships in his practice at Moses, Palmer & Howell, L.L.P., in Fort Worth, Texas, where he is a founding partner. He makes a point of advising young lawyers to never be afraid to pick up the phone.



David, who enjoys spending time on the family ranch southwest of Fort Worth where they have a whitetail deer operation on 440 acres, hikes Beaver Creek in Colorado.

“We’re in an email world and it’s a little less interpersonal than it used to be,” he says. “I think that can create some issues. Sometimes things can escalate. I tell people, don’t send any more emails. Pick up the phone and call this person and see if you can resolve it.”

Palmer traces his affinity for people skills and client management to growing up watching his parents run a small-animal veterinary office in Bedford, Texas. His father was frequently on call, responding to emergencies at all hours, sometimes even bringing sick animals home for overnight care. There was never a dull moment.

“Oddly enough, in a veterinary practice, it’s supposedly all about animals, but it’s really a lot about people,” Palmer says. “That’s come in handy in a law practice, which is all about people and clients.”

Palmer’s ties to Texas run deep. His family has been in the state since the 1840s, settling first in East Texas. He spent many childhood weekends fishing, spending time at the family farm, and going to Texas A&M football, basketball, and baseball games with his father, an Aggie himself.

While it may have been a foregone conclusion that Palmer would attend Texas A&M, he never developed an interest in becoming a veterinarian – and law wasn’t on his early career horizon either.

Instead, he pursued accounting. After earning his BBA in accounting from Texas A&M in 1992, he expected to pursue either graduate work in tax or a career with one of the major accounting firms. But when a few friends applied to law school, he decided to explore that option as well. Accepted at the University of Texas School of Law, he took it as a promising sign.

“Going to law school seemed to present a broad range of options,” Palmer says. “It felt less restrictive for me than a master’s in tax or public accounting.”

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David and his wife, Karen, met in Fort Worth and have been married for 27 years.

Like many lawyers, his perspective on the profession crystallized less in law school than “on the job.” At Cantey Hanger, a venerable firm that has been in Fort Worth for nearly 150 years, he spent more than a decade in the Commercial Litigation Section, honing his skills, discovering the value of problem-solving, and eventually becoming a partner.

In 2006, Palmer was ready for a change. A big one.

“We jumped off the cliff,” he says with a laugh, recalling how he and two colleagues – Shayne Moses and Tim Howell – decided to start their own firm. “At a big firm, if your chair squeaks, you call somebody, and they deal with it. Here, the light bill doesn’t get paid unless one of us does it.”

From the outset, it was all hands on deck. As for Palmer’s role, with his background in accounting, he took responsibility for the books and still handles them today; his wife, Karen – who later became the firm’s billing administrator – helped set up critical systems.

“It was a family affair for sure,” Palmer remembers. “Karen and I joked that we would get a babysitter on Friday night and come to the office to set things up.”

While Palmer’s focus remains litigation, the practice has seen an increase in transactional work, especially since COVID-19 when Texas courts slowed for a time, but deals did not. Palmer is experienced in an array of transactional matters, including oil and gas leases, surface use agreements, pipeline agreements, easements and rights-of-way, real estate transactions, purchase and sale agreements, and banking and lending matters.

Nearly two decades later, Moses, Palmer & Howell, remains a collegial five-lawyer firm, handling commercial litigation and transactional matters, with particular emphasis on oil and gas, real estate, construction, and banking. The firm is equipped to handle most types of business matters.

“What has made it work is being with the right people,” Palmer says. “We may have slightly different worldviews at times, but when it comes to practicing law and running a firm, we see eye-to-eye on virtually everything. When we haven’t, we’ve been able to amicably figure out how to proceed. I don’t know how you could do it for the long haul if you weren’t with the right people.”

Palmer is past chair of the Tarrant County Bar Association’s Energy Section and Judicial Evaluation Committee and is a



David and Karen with their children, Graham and Ellie, frequently attend athletic games at Texas A&M, where David is an alum.

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Sustaining Life Fellow of the Texas and Tarrant County Bar Foundations. He is also a proud supporter of Texas A&M, including its athletic programs and law school.

He also sees mentoring as part of his role. When opportunities arise, he counsels younger lawyers to develop professionalism and rapport with other attorneys and stresses that one of the hardest but most important skills is learning to “think like a lawyer.”

“You want a young lawyer who adds value; who shows initiative and creative thinking,” he says. “Someday they’re going to be the one in charge, and they need to start developing the skills to solve problems early.”

He also emphasizes balance. For many years, Palmer juggled growing a practice with raising a family. He and Karen have been married 27 years and raised two children: Ellie, 25, and Graham, 21.

“Like many people I know, my focus was not on hobbies but on being a dad and a lawyer for a long time,” he says.

Today, part of his interest during his downtime revolves around the family’s ranch southwest of Fort Worth, where they run a whitetail deer operation, lease cattle, and spend time outdoors. His 87-year-old mother still lives there.

As Palmer looks toward the future, he sees more time spent at the ranch and traveling with family. But for now, he continues to contribute to the practice.

Palmer says the attorneys at Moses, Palmer & Howell strive to be pragmatic, creative lawyers who deliver value and results for clients.

“We pride ourselves on being available and responsive to clients,” he adds. “It may seem like a silly example, but we answer our own phones.”



The Palmer family – Graham, Ellie, Karen, and David – recently traveled to Liberia.