

## Rainmaker Q&A: Bradley Arant's Tom Trent

*Law360, New York (September 06, 2013, 1:49 PM ET)* -- J. Thomas Trent Jr. is a partner in the Nashville office of Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP; chairman of the firm's economic development team; and a member of the firm's real estate practice group. He has experience in all areas of real estate transactions, including industrial development and economic incentives, leasing, corporate, joint venture, partnership and limited liability company law, and tax-exempt finance. Trent represents clients regionally and nationally, including major manufacturing companies, corporate users of commercial real estate, institutional investors, developers and lenders, and a number of foreign corporations.

With more than 30 years of experience in real estate and economic development law, Trent has handled complex commercial and real estate transactions across the country, including real estate acquisitions, workouts, equity participations, the structuring and financing of subordinated and unsubordinated ground leases, industrial development financing, tax increment financing, and payment in lieu of tax agreement transactions. Listings include The Best Lawyers in America; "Lawyer of the Year," Nashville, Real Estate for 2010; the "CRE 50" by the Nashville Post Magazine; and Chambers USA: America's Leading Business Lawyers (Real Estate, first tier), among others. He is a fellow in the American College of Mortgage Attorneys and is a member of the Tennessee Economic Development Council.

### **Q: How did you become a rainmaker?**

A: I began as a tax exempt finance lawyer when rates were so high that the only real estate development being done was with small issue IDBs. Although I was in our banking section, I learned real estate law by fixing borrowers' deal issues so that my client could lend to them; borrowers often then hired me (with the bank's permission) after the deal closed.

My office was between the banking and real estate sections, and when the firm grew to the point that the two teams moved to separate floors, I chose to move with the real estate team, but I continued to have mentors on both teams. My economic development practice is an outgrowth of my bond and real estate experience. My business development success began by having this early experience that gave me a marketable skill set, and by spending a lot of "investment time" to learn our clients' needs and business.

### **Q: How do you stay a rainmaker?**

A: Woody Allen said, "Eighty percent of success is showing up." That's true, but I also work hard at maintaining my skills and knowledge, and give many presentations to communities and prospective clients about economic development. The preparation you do for presentations helps you focus on the questions you might be asked, and that forces you to be current. I have been involved in most kinds of real estate transactions and financings, and have been blessed to work nationally with some of the smartest institutional clients in the business. I am old enough to have significant experience and am

always “showing up.”

**Q: What advice would you give to an aspiring rainmaker?**

A: When quite young, I was engaged by a syndication firm that grew into a very substantial client. It was humbling when the client said that part of why he hired me was that I was great at getting help from senior lawyers in the firm, and that he felt he got the strength of our firm’s platform, while usually paying my relatively low rate. As a young lawyer, your best clients are usually the more senior lawyers in your firm, and if they reciprocate by helping you, your potential clients will recognize the dynamic. Doing quality work in a timely manner is a given, and from there you have to find areas in which you can distinguish yourself — technical knowledge, the level of service, a positive attitude, etc.

**Q: Tell us a tale of landing a big client.**

A: Years ago, we were interviewed by a Japanese company and did everything wrong. We didn’t have enough business cards, talked to the interpreter instead of the executives, and did not get hired. We engaged a consultant to teach us the business culture, and I even tried to learn to golf (a miserable experience). Later, after landing a number of Japanese clients and giving seminars to that business community, the first company called and apologized for not understanding U.S. culture when they did not hire us and asked if we would be willing to take them on as a client.

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