

# Jeffrey Weinstock

## On the Right Track

After nearly ten years of practicing law, Jeff Weinstock, now the President of the DC staffing firm R & W Group, found himself at a professional crossroads. Life as an attorney was taking its toll physically and emotionally, and he couldn't shake the feeling that he wasn't on the right track. The hours were long, the work was arduous, and while he liked what he did, he found he didn't love it. He disliked spending so much time away from his wonderful wife, Carolyn, and their two young children, especially given his commitment to always put family first. He believed there must be a way to combine his talent for helping people access opportunities, his knowledge of the law, his background in college recruiting, and the connections he'd built throughout his career. There must be a way to create a new opportunity that would allow him to capitalize on those skills and spend more time with family.

Within a year, Jeff found the genesis of those skill sets in an opportunity presented by the Kelly Law Registry, a staffing firm that connects qualified candidates with jobs in the legal services industry. Early on during his time at Kelly, one particular placement cemented his conviction that he was on the right track and had found the perfect career path. "A young woman named Jill walked into the office," he recalls. "The receptionist called me and said, 'I think you're going to want to meet with her.'"

Once Jill sat down with Jeff, she immediately began crying and explained that she had found herself in a desperate financial situation. The small law firm where she worked as an attorney was declaring bankruptcy, and Jill had bills to pay. Although she was an attorney, she was willing to take a paralegal position or anything else that was available since she needed work quickly.

Jeff immediately had something in mind, but he knew it would take some politicking. Kelly

was staffing a project for the DC office of a large national firm, and the team needed six attorneys and six paralegals. The attorney spots were filled, but there was still room for one more paralegal. The only issue was the policy of the paralegal manager, Marlene; she never hired attorneys for paralegal work. Undeterred, Jeff called Marlene and worked to sell her on Jill.

"I said, 'I know your policy, but I just have this gut feeling. I think you'll really like her.'" Jeff said. "And Marlene said, 'You know what Jeff, because I know you and you are asking, I'll talk to her. No promises, but I'll talk to her.' At 4:00 PM I got a call from Marlene, who told me they were going to give it a shot. Jill was to start the following Monday as a temporary paralegal."

The paralegal job alone would have been a happy ending to the story, but Marlene called back with more good news the following week. The attorneys loved Jill so much that they had decided to create an additional contract attorney slot on the case, and

by the next week, her pay rate was increased as she moved into a temp attorney slot.

Six months later, the project was beginning to wind down, and people were being released. In fact, everyone except for Jill had been released, and Marlene called Jeff to inform him that for the first time ever, the partners chose to retain a temp attorney as a full-time employee. Jill had gone from a temp paralegal to a full-time attorney with a solid firm in mere months—an incredibly rewarding achievement for all involved, and an affirmation that she had found the right track for her.

"Jill called me and wanted to come by," remembers Jeff. "She walked into my office with a big box of chocolates and said, 'I can't thank you enough. I was so depressed when I walked in here last time, but you calmed me down. You don't realize how much you've changed my life.' I still



get chills thinking about that. And luckily, that's happened several times since then, for me and for others on my team. It was one of the first times where it really dawned on me that I had been given an incredible opportunity to really help people through my work."

In the years that followed, Jill's story met its elegant coda when she became a full partner at the firm. From temporary paralegal to partner—that's the journey Jeff wants to take qualified candidates on now as the CEO and President of R & W Group, the staffing and placement business he founded in 2009. Today, R & W Group places candidates in legal, administrative, accounting & finance, and IT jobs, in positions both temporary and permanent. R & W Group's team of eight recruiters boast various specialties, with about half of the placements going to law firms. Another large portion of their placements go to other businesses, and the small remainder land at non-profits. Clients range from start-ups to Fortune 50 businesses, including an international supermarket chain, large law firms, and the American Civil Liberties Union.

The success of R & W Group was truly built from the ground up. During his first year running the business, Jeff didn't draw a dime in salary. During his second year, he took only modest compensation. "We were actually profitable within 3 months," Jeff says. "All the money we brought in was put back into the company, though, whether that was buying laptops or starting to hire staff."

Drawing on his prior experience in staffing, Jeff was careful not to repeat management mistakes he had seen working for other agencies. Instead, he established early on the principle that R & W Group would go the extra mile for clients—a striking level of service compared to other staffing agencies that had a more blanket and rigid approach. "We have some clients that want invoices formatted a certain way," Jeff points out. "When I was at other companies, the answer would've been, 'No. This is how we format invoices, and we can't vary it just because one client wants us to.' But at R & W Group, we can. We're small enough and flexible enough that we can go out of the way to make accommodations for our clients."

Additionally, Jeff established several practices designed to optimize the matching process. R & W Group won't submit a resume for a

position without explicit approval from the candidate—something other staffing companies often skip in order to get a jump on potential competition. At times, agencies even submit resumes of candidates they haven't spoken to or met with yet. "We want our clients to know that this candidate is interested in their specific position," Jeff explains. "We find that, in the long run, clients will typically say, 'Agency X has sent me this resume, but they know nothing about this candidate, and they don't have the candidate's authorization, so I'm not going to accept resumes from Agency X anymore.' We will never be that agency. Clients know we do things the way they would want us to. We meet with the candidate, make sure they are right for the position, and then get the candidate's authorization to be submitted."

The same sense of commitment to providing quality, specialized service extends to the candidates as well. "We tell our candidates we can't guarantee that we're going to find you a job, but we can guarantee that we're going to help you find a job," Jeff affirms. "I love being in a position where I can help people, like teaching someone how to strengthen their resume or giving interview advice. That kind of assistance doesn't take too much time and can help tremendously, so we make a point to provide those services whenever possible." Jeff also insists on careful accounting and has all candidates as W-2 employees rather than 1099s, a tax workaround sometimes used by other staffing firms.

Jeff's honesty and "can-do" attitude can be traced back through his history to two important influences: his parents. Growing up as the oldest of three on Long Island, some of his earliest memories are of being dropped off at his grandparents on Sundays so his father could study for his law school classes. After graduating, Jeff's father went on to become a tax attorney.

Although he was exposed to the legal profession early on, Jeff hardly found it appealing. "I remember going into my father's office and seeing these books that just looked incredibly boring and saying, 'I don't want to practice law,'" he laughs. "I didn't realize that was accounting, not law. My dad practiced on the accounting side of tax law."

Jeff's mother worked as a speech therapist who took great care to ensure that her children did not pick up her own New York accent. All four of Jeff's grandparents were immigrants from Europe,

and both parents were first-generation Americans who demonstrated strong values and remarkable work ethic. “They taught me to never give up,” Jeff reflects. “If something is important to you, keep trying. Both of my parents really pushed the importance of family and education. They taught me not to cut corners—a particularly important value when it came to business later on in life.”

His parents’ emphasis on hard work shaped his fundamental view of the world. For fun, he remembers playing with friends in an era before cell phones, when the only rule was to get home before dark. He played baseball and soccer, ran track, and played trumpet in the high school marching and jazz bands. In his senior year of high school, he began working at Burger King—a position that earned him some extra social stature with his classmates when the restaurant gave him a stack of coupons to share with friends at school.

Family was particularly important to the Weinstocks, and every Thanksgiving they would go to Philadelphia to visit with Jeff’s aunt, uncle, and cousins. “Family was first and foremost, always,” Jeff says, “That was something my parents felt very strongly about. Even if there’s a little bit of distance, family’s still family. Family’s always first.”

After high school, Jeff attended Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, and remembers it as one of the best times of his life. He did well in nearly every class, and he became involved in campus politics. Along with eleven other students, Jeff helped create the multi-disciplinary Cognitive Science program, now a popular major at the school. He also was elected Vice President of the senior class after showing a knack for leadership, delegating responsibilities and planning events on campus.

At Vassar, Jeff first discovered his passion for connecting candidates with opportunities. After conducting campus tours for several years, he was one of the few students selected to become a senior interviewer for the college. In this role, he met with prospective students to speak with them about their desire to attend Vassar, and help determine if the school might be the right fit. He enjoyed it so much that he wondered if he could somehow turn his work with the college into a career. Unfortunately, he quickly discovered that such Admissions jobs pay very little. However, having no family of his own yet to support, he decided to look for work in the field while he

applied for law school.

The following year, Jeff took the LSAT, completed his applications, and worked as the Assistant Director of Admissions for Sarah Lawrence College, a small, liberal arts school like Vassar. He loved the work and was happy to travel across the country meeting with students at their high schools. He liked it so much, in fact, that after being accepted to Boston University School of Law, Jeff decided to defer admission and remain on the road, recruiting, for one more year.

After two years working at Sarah Lawrence, a school that doesn’t issue grades to students, the hyper-competitive nature of law school seemed foreign and even damaging to some of his classmates. “I enrolled at the Boston University School of Law, and I can still remember going to pick up my grades at the Registrar after first semester and being disturbed by the scene there,” he says. “Some of my classmates were literally crying as they walked out. I saw one woman who said, ‘I really want to practice criminal law, but I got a C in criminal law, and now I can’t!’ I thought how crazy it was for her to say that, because one thing has nothing to do with the other. A grade shows how you did on one test. With that, I decided I wasn’t going to obsess over grades and was instead going to keep things in perspective by focusing on the big picture of what we were learning.” Jeff never picked up his grades from the Registrar throughout the rest of his law school career. His strategy of staying focused on the work served him well, and Jeff graduated with honors and as a member of the Law Review.

Just before graduation, in January of 1990, Jeff met Carolyn, the love of his life. She was studying for an MBA, and they both attended a holiday party thrown by a mutual friend. When he asked for her phone number, Carolyn said, “Look it up.” Within three dates, he knew she was the one. On their third date, Valentine’s Day, he showed up with a box of chocolates, only to find that she had a box of Godiva chocolates for him too. Without telling her, he kept the box. That summer, the couple moved to DC where Jeff had accepted his first job out of law school.

A mere eleven months after they met, in November, Jeff was ready to propose. He put the engagement ring in the empty chocolate box, took it back to a Godiva store, and asked the clerk to rewrap it. He gave it to her at a private dinner that evening, and after accepting the proposal, she

began calling their many friends with the good news. "Looking back, she's really gotten me through every tough spot in my career, providing both solid business advice and crucial support," he says with gratitude. "I couldn't have done it without her."

After graduating from BU, Jeff worked at McKenna & Cuneo for five years, where he practiced government contracts litigation and maintained an exhausting travel schedule. "I travelled to Fort Worth every week for two and a half years," Jeff recalls. "I knew Fort Worth better than I knew DC. After we bought our first house, in Vienna, I remember coming back to Dulles Airport, handing my address to the taxi driver, and saying, 'Here's where I live; I have no idea how to get there.' In that moment, I realized there was something wrong with that picture."

In addition to the litigation work, Jeff had taken on pro bono cases in family law, the work he truly enjoyed. An opportunity arose for Jeff and another attorney to join a team at Sherman, Meehan, Curtin & Ain, as they staffed up for a prominent divorce case. He practiced family law with the firm for several more years before realizing he was truly burnt out. "I was working six days a week," he says. "It felt like I was always preparing for a hearing or going to trial, and just working in general. I felt good about what I was doing, but it just wasn't right. It wasn't enough."

Carolyn was supportive, encouraging Jeff to figure out what it was he truly loved. He knew he loved recruiting from his work at Sarah Lawrence, and now he had expertise and contacts in law. After some thought, he knew that recruiting for law firms was the obvious solution. In 1998, he began working at Kelly Law Registry, marking the start of his recruiting career. He was comfortable doing legal staffing, but continued to expand his recruiting network by pushing himself into new arenas. In 2007, he went on to join Sparks, a regional staffing group mostly known for administrative work. Jeff enjoyed working there, where he launched an IT staffing group within the company. Everything was going very well, so he was shocked to find himself, at the height of the recession, laid off. "I was totally surprised," Jeff recalls, "That was really tough. I was 45 at the time, and I didn't feel like I was done with the industry."

Rather than look for a new job, Jeff decided to make a bet on himself and start R & W

Group. With the severance pay from Sparks, and with the full support of Carolyn and his parents, Jeff founded the business that the *Legal Times* has since named the #3 recruiter in DC.

R & W Group has succeeded in large part because of Jeff's big picture approach to business and life, which is something he recommends to those starting their careers. For young people leaving school and entering the working world today, Jeff advises taking the long view. "This is just your first step," he says. "Your career is long, and you will likely have several major job changes along the way, so don't put too much pressure on yourself. Try to learn something from every job you take, making a point to understand both the positives and the negatives. Whatever you experience, use it in your next position, and the position after that, and the one after that. This is how you become better and better over time, with evolving skill sets and never a wasted experience."

For Jeff, caring about people and trying to help them in their next step has always been a top motivation. From interviewing high school students at Vassar, to running his own recruiting business, he's spent his career putting people on the path that's right for them. "When people ask me what I do, I say I help change people's lives," Jeff says. "I know how discouraging it is to feel like you're on the wrong track, and I know the sense of freedom and exhilaration that comes from finally finding the right one. Everyone deserves that chance to reach their true potential, and through R & W we're on track to help them get there."

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