

GCs Name The Top Attorneys For Client Service

By **Melissa Maleske**

Law360, Chicago (February 6, 2017, 7:27 PM EST) -- Hundreds of corporate counsel have named 54 attorneys as client service standouts for at least two years in a row, praising their client focus, responsiveness, legal know-how and business chops.

The 54 MVPs are among 319 attorneys named in a BTI Client Services All-Stars 2017 report released this week by The BTI Consulting Group Inc. (Wellesley, Mass.). To create the roster, BTI interviewed more than 300 in-house counsel, asking them to name the attorneys who deliver “the absolute best client service.” Additionally, BTI recognized eight Super All-Stars who were named by more than one client.

While many attorneys focus on charging hours or working on a matter, the MVPs rise in the morning and live to serve their clients, said Michael Rynowecer, BTI’s president and founder.

“These individuals tend to be very client-centric,” Rynowecer said. “Everything they do is built around their clients, and they know if they take care of their clients, every other thing in their career will be taken care of. That is not a widespread view.”

Uniformly, Rynowecer said, the All-Stars have found a way to incorporate a commitment to help, client focus, an understanding of their clients’ business, and value for the dollar into all of their work and client interactions.

In other words, client service isn’t just a single focus, as MVP and Super All-Star Stephen Glover puts it. Glover, who is co-chair of Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP’s mergers and acquisitions practice, said focus No. 1 is responsiveness, which means going out of your way to be responsive even when it’s difficult.

“That’s not enough, though, because there are a lot of lawyers who can answer the phone and return messages,” Glover said. “It’s also really important to provide advice that’s well-grounded technically ... but lots of lawyers know the law and can describe how the rule operates. The third thing is really tailoring your advice in a way that makes it practical and conforms with the needs of the business and whatever issues they may be facing at the time.”

Jeffrey Lederman of Joseph & Cohen, an MVP and a Super All-Star, got an early education in client satisfaction watching his father’s auto repair business which, like Lederman’s practice, focused on building decadeslong relationships. One client told BTI Lederman is “all about customer service.” Through good results and bad, Lederman wants his clients to know they’re getting good representation and fair value for their dollars.

“Clients have to feel confident you are giving them value in the hours you’re billing and that you are putting their interests ahead of your own, your desire to make money,” said Lederman, a partner at the litigation boutique. “Frankly, if the result doesn’t go as well as our expectations, I realize they’re not just paying for hours, they’re paying for a result, and I’m not afraid to accommodate them. That brings them back again.”

Dentons partner James Manley, an MVP and Super All-Star, also points to his early years as formative in his client service mindset. Clients said Manley, a member of the litigation and dispute resolution practice, “constantly anticipates our needs.”

“Fundamentally, client service is about caring deeply for and about your clients and being willing to make sacrifices for their benefit,” Manley said. “My parents both taught and modeled the philosophy of thinking of others before yourself, which I try to apply to all aspects of my life, including my practice.”

According to another MVP and Super All-Star, Peter Teare of Reed Smith LLP, the most important thing attorneys can do is get to know their clients and understand that the job of an attorney is to understand what it takes them to make them look good in front of their boss every year.

“That may not be what we think it is — it’s probably not producing bulleted memos with pages of footnotes,” said Teare, who is chair of Reed Smith’s corporate group in Europe and the Middle East. “It’s more likely to be delivering on time and on budget, coming up with mechanisms to deliver legal services more efficiently or creating a certainty in budgeting. It’s about having those conversations with the clients and making them feel that you’re on their side and you’re going to make them look good.”

Teare also lives by the mantra of “no surprises.” Whether it’s an outcome or a bill, he communicates with clients to ensure they know what’s coming.

Finally, MVP and Super All-Star Randi Lesnick, an M&A partner at Jones Day, said client service means interacting with your clients and getting a real understanding of their business — not just what you can glean from their public statement. But the firm around a lawyer can make the difference too, Lesnick said. A firm that makes client service part of the firm culture will put attorneys on the right path.

“From Day 1 here, you’re told client service is what distinguishes a good lawyer from a great lawyer,” Lesnick said. “It’s about paying attention and anticipating their needs, anticipating issues that might face your client because you’re staying on top of things and you see other companies in their space with a similar issue.”

BTI recognized 54 attorneys as MVPs who have been chosen by clients as All-Stars for at least two consecutive years. Leslie A. Lanusse of Adams & Reese has been an All-Star for seven consecutive years. Tom Clare of Clare Locke has been recognized for five consecutive years. Four-year MVPs are Wayne A. Graver of Lavin O’Neil Cedrone & DiSipio, Michael Hoffman of Arena Hoffman, Michael A. Kahn of Crowell & Moring, William J. Kelly III of Kelly & Walker, Tracy E. Kern of Jones Walker and E. Joshua Rosenkranz of Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe. Three-year MVPs are John T. Baecher of Chadbourne & Parke, Ariel J. Deckelbaum of Paul Weiss, Christian W. Fabian of Mayer Brown, Stephen Glover of Gibson Dunn & Crutcher, Kirk T. May of German May, Pankaj K. Sinha of Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom and Michael J. Solecki of Jones Day.

Two-year MVPs are Brian Barrett of Eversheds Sutherland, John H. Booher of Hogan Lovells, Daniel I.

Booker of Reed Smith, Matthew A. Brill of Latham & Watkins, James M. Brogan of DLA Piper, Jeffrey A. Chapman of Gibson Dunn & Crutcher, Vito A. Costanzo of Holland & Knight, Scott Dailard of Cooley, Joseph M. Drayton of Cooley, William L. Duda of Ogletree Deakins Nash Smoak & Stewart, Sandra Edelman of Dorsey & Whitney, Scott D. Feringa of Sullivan Ward Asher & Patton, Merton G. Gollaher of Wiggin & Dana, Gary A. Goodman of Dentons, Richard W. Grice of Alston & Bird, Edward D. Herlihy of Wachtell Lipton Rosen & Katz, Craig A. Hoffman of BakerHostetler, Michael S. Jeffries of Armstrong Teasdale, Russell S. Jones Jr. of Polsinelli, Patrick J. Leddy of Jones Day, Jeffrey J. Lederman of Joseph & Cohen, Michael A. Leichtling of Sills Cummis & Gross, Gregg M. Lemley of Ogletree Deakins Nash Smoak & Stewart, Randi C. Lesnick of Jones Day, James B. Manley, Jr. of Dentons, Jennifer R. Mewaldt of Faegre Baker Daniels, James P. Muehlberger of Shook Hardy & Bacon, Daniel R. Mummery of Gibson Dunn & Crutcher, S. Christian Nelson of Belin McCormick, James N. Nowacki of Kirkland & Ellis, G. Scott Rafshoon of Dentons, Steven L. Rahhal of Littler Mendelson, Gerald F. Roach of Smith Anderson, Ronald Y. Rothstein of Winston & Strawn, Ginger D. Schröder of Schröder Joseph & Associates, Michael J. Silver of Hogan Lovells, Ben W. Subin of Holland & Knight, Peter Teare of Reed Smith and H. James Wulfsberg of Burke Williams & Sorensen.

The eight Super All-Stars who earned accolades from multiple clients are William P. Aiken of Chambliss Bahner & Stophel, Deborah A. Gitomer of Norton Rose Fulbright, Stephen Glover of Gibson Dunn & Crutcher, Jeffrey J. Lederman of Joseph & Cohen, Randi C. Lesnick of Jones Day, James B. Manley Jr. of Dentons, Peter Teare of Reed Smith and William G. Thomas of Reed Smith.

--Editing by Bruce Goldman.