

GCs Name Best-Of-The-Best Attys

By **Jake Simpson**

Law360, New York (February 03, 2014, 6:40 PM ET) -- Hundreds of in-house counsel from the world's largest companies listed 330 private practice attorneys who deliver superior client service in an increasingly competitive legal environment, including 56 lawyers who are receiving the distinction for a second consecutive year.

Of the attorneys nominated by roughly 300 Fortune 1000 companies and other large firms, an even more elite subset has been a favorite of clients for several years running, according to the 2014 BTI Client Service All-Stars report released this week by The BTI Consulting Group Inc. (Wellesley, Mass.): A group of 15 attorneys hailing from a variety of practice areas have been nominated by corporate counsel for at least the last three years.

BTI President Michael Rynowecer told Law360 that providing superior client service is a way of life for the elite partners named as Client Service MVPs for being recognized by in-house counsel year after year. A total of 56 Client Service All-Stars from this year were also named to BTI's list in 2013.

"The common thread is that the multiyear individuals get up and live, eat, breathe and sleep on how they can help their clients," Rynowecer said.

First among equals on BTI's list is Sullivan & Cromwell LLP senior chairman H. Rodgin Cohen, who has been nominated by at least one corporate counsel in 12 of the last 13 years. A longtime attorney for large banking groups and other financial institutions, Cohen has been called "the absolute best to work with" by his clients, according to BTI.

"Mr. Cohen treats every client like they're his only client, while they all know that he has multiple high-demand clients," Rynowecer said. "He's extraordinarily focused, but you would never get the impression that he is too busy for you."

Cohen emphasized the importance of building relationships with clients, not just with a general counsel or chief legal officer but with a client's entire legal department. He noted that deputy general counsel "grow up to be GCs," associates grow up to be deputies, and so on.

"If I have two calls simultaneously with a general counsel and a young legal department lawyer, I'll take the general counsel's call first," Cohen said. "But I follow the rule that you never go home if a call is not answered, and so I would make sure to call back the young lawyer by the end of the day."

Though rate pressures have become an increasingly important consideration for law firms, Cohen noted that top clients will likely not scrimp when it comes to their most critical problems. Instead they will look for a combination of "responsiveness, initiative, quality and sound judgment," he said.

Three other veteran attorneys have been named to BTI's client service list for four straight years. They are Leslie Lanusse of Adams and Reese LLP, William Pickering of Chambliss Bahner & Stophel PC and Kim Walker of Faegre Baker Daniels LLP.

One key to Pickering's mindset is a commitment to innovation. The veteran Chambliss Bahner shareholder said he takes a proactive approach to client service, recognizing problems before they happen and heading off issues before they become critical.

"The client is looking to you to recognize and anticipate problems and issues that they for whatever reason might not have focused on and might miss," Pickering said. "I've been practicing law for 37 years now, and when I first started out I was told that what you need to watch out for are not the questions clients ask you, but what they don't ask you."

Looking at issues from the client's perspective has also been key to the success of distinguished King & Spalding LLP partner Chilton Davis Varner. She is one of just four attorneys who were nominated to the BTI list by multiple clients, earning her the title of 2014 Super All-Star.

Varner invoked a former giant of the industry when describing her client service approach: former King & Spalding managing partner Griffin B. Bell, who went on to serve as a Circuit Court judge and then as President Jimmy Carter's attorney general before returning to the law firm.

"Judge Bell taught me early on that if you're a trial lawyer, it's important to walk in the shoes of your clients to understand the business challenges as well as the legal challenges they face," Varner said, noting that she turns off her cellphone during client meetings so she doesn't get distracted. "He also told me that being embroiled in litigation is never fun for the client."

The other three 2014 Super All-Stars are Gerald Maatman Jr. of Seyfarth Shaw LLP, and Douglas Sullivan and Michael Kahn of Crowell & Moring LLP. Maatman, who is also a three-year All-Star MVP, was nominated by two separate clients for the second year in a row.

Like Varner, Maatman said he tries to think from the client's perspective. He has taken a proactive approach and views unexpected legal developments as the antithesis of quality client service.

"I think the worse thing that can happen on my watch is a surprise," Maatman said. "If a surprise occurs, I'm not doing my job."

Among law firms, Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP led the way with 10 attorneys honored as 2014 Client Service All-Stars. Rynowecer noted that all 10 Morgan Lewis lawyers were not on BTI's 2013 list, a sign that a superior client relationship culture is spreading throughout the law firm.

Taken in sum, the practices of the 330 attorneys named as Client Service All-Stars are a rubric for attorneys at law firms looking to improve their client relationships and attract new business. But according to Cohen, the best in the business at working with clients have already begun looking forward.

"What we have to do is think ahead about the problems of the future, because the solutions will not

necessarily be the solutions of the past," he said.

In addition to Maatman, the list of three-year All-Star MVPs includes Donald Scott of Bartlit Beck Herman Palenchar & Scott LLP, Jeffrey Ostrager of Curtis Mallet-Prevost Colt & Mosle LLP, Sandra Jeskie of Duane Morris LLP, William Corum of Husch Blackwell LLP, Michael Jacobs of Morrison & Foerster LLP, Roy Bash of Polsinelli Shughart PC, Amy Lee Stewart of Rose Law Firm, David Antzis of Saul Ewing LLP, Robert Minkus of Schiff Hardin LLP, and Kendrick Riggs of Stoll Keenon Ogden PLLC.

--Editing by Edrienne Su.

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