

GCs Name Cream Of The Crop Litigators

By **Benjamin Horney**

Law360, New York (February 10, 2015, 4:56 PM ET) -- More than 120 litigators were chosen by corporate counsel as being the best at keeping them happy by understanding and helping them meet their goals.

The litigation specialists were among 354 attorneys nominated by their clients in the 2015 BTI Client Service All-Stars **report** from The BTI Consulting Group (Wellesley, Mass.). This year saw nearly 130 litigators honored by their clients, up from less than a hundred a year ago.

BTI President Michael Rynowecer said the winning attorneys were recognized by their corporate counterparts for a number of reasons, including the ability to focus on the clients' desired end game — regardless of whether that means a win or a settlement.

Rynowecer said that throughout the almost 320 telephone interviews that helped craft this year's list, he regularly heard that the best litigators are able to "focus and understand how and why clients want to settle" while also developing a strategy that "prepares you for something if you don't settle."

"The all-stars understand how important it is to have the ability to understand what your client wants," Rynowecer said. "Their recommendations and strategies are focused with that in mind."

A number of the attorneys who made this year's list agreed with that assessment, saying that a focus on what the client wants and needs is of the utmost importance.

"We put our clients' interest first in every decision," Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney PC's Steven Bizar told Law360. "It's as simple as that."

Frank M. Lowrey IV, a partner at Bondurant Mixson & Elmore LLP, said he believed general counsel seek out litigators who "make their client's objectives their own."

Blake Cassels & Graydon LLP partner Paul B. Schabas said it's vital to focus on getting the result the client needs.

"Often it isn't about winning but about getting the resolution that works best for the enterprise," he said. "To do that, you have to appreciate what the client does and work with them to get to the solution they want."

Clare Locke LLP's Thomas A. Clare noted that it's no longer enough merely to be a "technically competent" attorney. Nowadays, being a rock-solid litigator involves a ton of components, including understanding the goals of the client, he told Law360.

"Where [Clare Locke] tries to differentiate ourselves is by really understanding what the client's objectives are for litigation," he said.

And while attorneys and clients alike appear to agree that being able to put the client's desires first is one of the most important things a litigator can do, many other traits are integral to success, such as being able to collaborate with a clients' in-house counsel.

"The in-house lawyers with whom we work tend to be very smart and experienced," Bizar said. "So my team and I really invite and welcome their input and enjoy the collaboration. I have been told that not all litigators are so open and welcoming of the in-house lawyers' input."

Clare said that excellent communication is key, because keeping clients and their in-house counsel as up-to-date as possible makes them feel like "part of the team."

"Making sure we're cross-pollinating with other legal professionals is vitally important," he said.

It's crucial, however, not to have a blanket way of handling things. Every client and case is different and should be managed on a case-by-case basis, Clare noted.

"Being agile is really important," he said. "You have to be nimble in responding to client requests but also be able to adjust your approach to litigation to accommodate the way this particular client deals with things. Some in-house counsel are very involved, some aren't."

It's also essential to get to know your clients beyond just facts of the case you have been entrusted to handle, Joseph Lucci, a partner at BakerHostetler, told Law360.

"The trait that I think is most important in representing a client is spending the time and effort to get to know their business, not only in terms of their goals and strategy for meeting the needs of their customers, but also in terms of what their expectations are for me and my team in handling their litigation," he said.

Alston & Bird LLP partner Jessica Perry Corley said that in order to "properly defend a case," the litigator must "get in the weeds and know the client's business as well as they do."

"Their problems are my problems to help solve, and I want to help them achieve the result that is the best for their business," she said. "Our goal is to do what is in the best interest of their business — be that to settle a matter before litigation or fight it all the way to trial."

Clare said that he takes the time to learn about a client's business "as a whole," as opposed to just the "small slice" he's working on.

Thad Thano Dameris, a partner at Arnold & Porter LLP, said that being a top-notch litigator means going "above and beyond" what is expected.

"I think it certainly requires earning the client's trust over time by showing that you understand their business and its objective and have good judgment," he said. "How else can you solve a client's problem without running the risk of becoming part of, or compounding, it?"

This year's list saw a number of names that will be familiar to those who saw last year's list, with repeat honorees including Robert Pees of Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP, Jessica Corley of Alston & Bird LLP, Douglas Sullivan of Crowell & Moring LLP and Allen Ruby of Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP.

A number of firms had multiple attorneys recognized for their litigation prowess this year, including BakerHostetler, Bondurant Mixson & Elmore LLP, Crowell & Moring LLP, DLA Piper and Foley & Lardner LLP.

--Editing by Kat Laskowski.