

Daily Journal

www.dailyjournal.com

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2024

Unvarnished Advice

Attorneys at LightGabler offer practical counsel and fight fair, opposition lawyers say.

By Shane Nelson

Special to the Daily Journal

Longtime employment attorney Jonathan F. Light said he's conducted roughly 600 sexual harassment avoidance trainings with clients over his more than 40-year legal career, but one of them stands out.

"I get a call from an HR director one day, and she says, 'John, I'm working for a new company and the owner didn't get the training that's mandatory. Could you come down and do a one-on-one at his desk?'" Light recalled. "I said, 'Sure.' And she said, 'The only wrinkle is - if you're OK with it - it's Larry Flynt from Hustler Magazine.'"

Light described that training with a chuckle as "the pinnacle of my career."

"I stood at Larry Flynt's desk - with his wife standing next to him the whole time and he's in his wheelchair. And I did a one-on-one sex harassment training with my little PowerPoint at his desk in this giant oval office in his headquarters on Wilshire Boulevard. And he was actually pretty engaging and had some interesting comments. It was surreal, but it was an interesting experience."

A 1981 UCLA School of Law graduate, Light started his career at Loeb & Loeb LLP, tackling employment defense matters. Light then moved to now-defunct Nordman Cormany Hair & Compton LLP in Oxnard, where he handled defense-side employment litigation for 26 years. Light and four of the firm's other employment attorneys



Chandra A. Beaton and Jonathan F. Light | Ricardo Pineda / Daily Journal photo

left, however, in the spring of 2011 to form LightGabler LLP.

"We just had some issues among partners - typical law firm stuff," Light said of the departure. "And as much as I loved a lot of the people there, it was a good time to go start our own firm."

Based in Camarillo, LightGabler is home to 21 attorneys, concentrating on employment defense counsel and litigation.

"We're up to about 5,000 clients at this point," Light said. "Our bread and butter goes up to probably 500, 600 employees. We don't have a ton of big, big companies. ... Typically, we're under 1,000 employees."

Partner Chandra A. Beaton, who joined LightGabler in 2015 and now

chairs the litigation department, said the firm does a great deal of wage-and-hour class action defense work for a diverse collection of businesses.

"Really in all types of industries - agriculture, medical, health care, business, construction, manufacturing, aerospace," Beaton explained.

A 2002 Pepperdine University School of Law graduate, Beaton had more than 12 years of civil litigation experience when she joined LightGabler, but she didn't know much about employment law.

"I interviewed with Jon, ... and he said, 'I can teach you employment law,'" Beaton recalled. "With your civil litigation chops, you'll be fine."

Beaton said there's no shortage of emotion on the defense side of employment litigation.

"If you have a particularly difficult case - maybe a sexual harassment case or you have a claim where the employee alleges they were somehow mistreated," Beaton explained, "then our clients will be very passionate, [saying] 'That just absolutely did not happen' or 'This is a shakedown.' It is very emotional for our clients."

Light takes satisfaction from helping companies make good decisions that help prevent future disputes.

"I'm very sympathetic to employees, and I try to get clients to do the right thing," Light explained.

Daily Journal

www.dailyjournal.com

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2024

“Sometimes they take a hard line when they really shouldn’t. ... I went around and around with a client on vacation and sick time recently and got them to do things that I thought were a little bit more fair to the employees. That was very fulfilling.”

Last year LightGabler went to trial on behalf of Camarillo-based gift planning and blended gifts marketing company Crescendo Interactive Inc., which faced discrimination, retaliation, and wrongful termination claims. *Christopher Jaarda*

v. Crescendo Interactive, Inc., 56-2019-00536321-CU-WT-VTA (Ventura Super. Ct., filed Nov. 20, 2019).

“There was about \$10 million at stake - with family members fighting for control of the business with the evil son-in-law, trying to snake the owners out of their shares in the company,” Light recalled. “Literally during trial, the other side handed over the shares because they were getting beat up so badly. Then we beat the wrongful termination case that went with it. That was a huge win.”

Ventura plaintiffs’ attorney Brian D. Hefelfinger - who was not involved in the case but has opposed LightGabler on several different matters over the past 10 years - said the firm fights fair.

“We know with them that they’re going to put up a good fight and advocate for their client,” Hefelfinger explained. “But we don’t really feel like we have to watch out for the knife in the back with Jon’s firm.”

Hefelfinger added that Light enjoys a terrific reputation within the employment law community.

“What I respect about Jon is that he has more than enough business, so he doesn’t really have any incentive other than to give his clients what I feel like is very straightforward, practical, unvarnished advice,” Hefelfinger said. “Because if they disagree with the advice and want to get a second opinion, I don’t think it really will hurt his feelings because there’s plenty of other people clamoring to be his client.”

news@dailyjournal.com