

8 Firms Boast The Most Client-Savvy Attorneys

By **Aebra Coe**

Law360, New York (February 7, 2016, 3:27 PM ET) -- The names of eight law firms were repeatedly on the lips of general counsel this year as they reported which attorneys stood out to them as the best of the best in client service.

A tiny 10 percent of BigLaw firms were home to multiple attorneys lavished with praise this year by general counsel on their superior ability to serve clients, according to the 2016 BTI Client Service All-Stars report by BTI Consulting Group (Wellesley, Mass.), which surveyed more than 300 legal decision makers at organizations with \$1 billion or more in revenue.

An even shorter list, eight firms, had at least five attorneys land on BTI's All-Star list. The adroit eight include Jones Day, Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP, Dentons, BakerHostetler LLP, Gibson Dunn, Mayer Brown LLP, Reed Smith LLP and Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP.

Jones Day and Skadden each had a whopping eight partners named as All-Stars, with Dentons coming in a close third with seven.

"Culturally, client service is embedded in everything they do," BTI Consulting Group founder Michael Rynowecer said of the top eight firms. "It has more air time within the firm and it's discussed more frequently as a metric and a way of life than at other firms. They have carved it out as an area in which they make changes on a regular basis to improve their performance."

The eight firms at the top of the pile account for 52 of BTI's 312 total client service All-Stars, suggesting a firmwide culture of client service that is more dominant than at the majority of law firms.

"Our clients expect us to be great lawyers — and we are," Reed Smith global managing partner Sandy Thomas said. "We know our clients want us to be creative strategists, innovative solution developers, collaborative team players and they expect us to understand their business and the competitive environment in which they operate."

Dentons' U.S. managing partner Mike McNamara noted that his firm's entire global and U.S. strategy is client-driven.

"It's about knowing their business and industry, listening to them, anticipating where they need to move, and being more than just a lawyer in the process," McNamara said. "We want to deliver the right substantive experience, with the right industry knowledge, where the client requires assistance."

Mayer Brown chairman Paul Theiss said building and maintaining strong relationships with clients is a top priority for his firm as well.

“We devote considerable time and energy to understanding our clients’ needs and the challenges they face, and we partner with them to develop innovative solutions,” Theiss said. “At the same time, we are well aware of the critical need to maintain these efforts and continue to enhance our client service every day.”

BakerHostetler chairman Steven Kestner pointed out that client service doesn't just happen in one department or in one practice area at his firm.

"We're pleased to see such a high number of our attorneys counted among BTI's Client Service All-Star team for 2016, especially representing diverse areas of the firm's practice, from privacy and litigation to labor and employment and corporate securities," Kestner said. "Their selection is a reflection of BakerHostetler's commitment to service on a daily basis — not only in responding to our clients' immediate need for counsel but in working together as business partners in anticipating their longer-term concerns and priorities."

The firms that led the pack by wowing clients with their ability to please are each home to a number of attorneys who not only earned the All-Star label this year, but have earned it multiple years in a row and have had multiple clients compliment them on the good job they do.

Jones Day is home to three of BTI's so-called client service MVPs. MVPs have had their service abilities recognized by general counsel for two or more years in a row. Those attorneys include James P. Dougherty, Michael J. Solecki and John G. Froemming.

Similarly, Skadden boasts three MVPs, including partners Allen J. Ruby, Sean C. Doyle and Pankaj K. Sinha. Ruby has been recognized for outstanding client service for four consecutive years.

In addition to the All-Star and MVP ranks, BTI also included a category for “Super All-Stars,” attorneys who were labelled by more than one client as the best at delivering quality service.

Jones Day's Michael J. Solecki and Dentons' James B. Manley Jr. were both named super All-Stars.

“He gives sound and practical legal advice and is the absolute best when it comes to follow up. He never leaves us guessing what is going on,” one client said of Manley Jr.

According to Rynowecer, firms like Jones Day and Skadden — and the six others that made the list — don't just rise above their competitors in the minds of general counsel out of luck. There are deliberate policies they enact that lead to these results.

“If you look at virtually all of them, they have strong client team programs. Virtually all have a formal client service initiative where there is an individual accountable for client service within the firm,” he said. “As opposed to other firms that will ask partners to improve or state that it's important, these firms actually have individuals whose success or failure is tied to their ability to improve client service.”

At Jones Day, one of those people is client affairs partner Glen Nager.

"Our approach is formed by institutional relationships with clients: All clients are clients of the firm, not individual lawyers, offices or practices," Nager said. "We recognize clients have institutional needs, and in turn provide institutional solutions, serving clients as one firm worldwide. We are true partners, with each other, and even more importantly, with our clients."

All-Star attorneys at the top eight firms include Skadden's Sean C. Doyle, Fred T. Goldberg Jr., Kenton J. King, Leif King, John H. Lyons, Allen J. Ruby, Pankaj J. Sinha and Robert J. Sullivan; Jones Day's James P. Dougherty, John G. Froemming, Daniel C. Hagen, Jeffrey J. Jones, David A. Kutik, Patrick J. Leddy, Randi C. Lesnick and Michael J. Solecki; Dentons' Laura Leigh Geist, Gary A. Goodman, Barbara B. Johnston QC, James B. Manley Jr., Stafford Matthews, G. Scott Rafshoon and Douglas A. Scullion; BakerHostetler's Todd A. Dawson, Suzanne K. Hanselman, Craig A. Hoffman, David G. Holcombe, Amy J. Traub and Jeffrey T. Williams; Gibson Dunn's Jeffrey A. Chapman, Eric M. Feuerstein, Stephen Glover, Elizabeth A. Ising, Daniel R. Mummery and Jay Tabor; Mayer Brown's Curtis A. Doty, Christian W. Fabian, Charles Salem Hallab, Marc F. Sperber, Jason P. Wagenmaker and Carmine R. Zarlenga; Reed Smith's Jennifer L. Achilles, Daniel I. Booker, Robert D. Phillips Jr., Nicolle R. Snyder Bagnell, Peter Teare and Paul B. Turner; and Morgan Lewis' Danny S. Ashby, Martin F. Conniff, Timothy P. Matthews, Steven R. Wall and Paul A. Zevnik.

--Editing by Mark Lebetkin.

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