

Rising Star: Covington's Jennifer Saperstein

By Al Barbarino

Law360 (August 7, 2020, 3:47 PM EDT) -- Jennifer Saperstein, a partner at Covington & Burling LLP and vice chair of the firm's anti-corruption practice group, advises clients on complex compliance issues and has worked with big names including Anheuser Busch, Atlas Air, Hillrom and the NFL, landing her a spot among the compliance practitioners under age 40 honored by Law360 Rising Stars.

HER MOST INTERESTING RECENT CASE:

Saperstein helped Anheuser-Busch InBev implement what she described as a cutting-edge data analytics system to assess compliance risk in connection with the company's acquisition of fellow brewer SAB Miller.

The compliance tool, the brainchild of the beverage giant's global compliance head Matt Galvin and his staff, relies on data analytics and a risk-scoring system to detect bribery, corruption, fraud, money laundering and embezzlement.

While compliance surrounding acquisitions is often focused on potential issues in a company's past, Saperstein noted that the client was intent on implementing a "forward-looking" system to monitor compliance in real time.

"It felt like we were part of something very innovative, which required bringing in diverse teams from InBev, Covington and forensic accountants to work together," she said. "It was fun to expand upon my lawyer hat and work with this cross-functional team, broadening beyond the core legal risks, to help build something useful from both a legal and business perspective."

HER PROUDEST MOMENT AS AN ATTORNEY:

Saperstein helped transform the compliance department of a large global company facing alleged Foreign Corrupt Practices Act violations from a bare-bones operation to a well-oiled machine.



Jennifer Saperstein
Covington & Burling

Age: 37
Home base: Washington, D.C.
Position: Partner
Law school: New York University
School of Law
First job after law
school: Associate at Covington &
Burling

The new program went beyond policies and procedures, implementing sophisticated training, monitoring systems and auditing, she said. This helped lead to a resolution with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission that resulted in a reduced penalty.

"This was a transition from a leanly staffed, relatively basic paper program to one of the most sophisticated compliance programs," Saperstein said. "I was proud to see the impact that had on the investigation and the resolution."

In addition, the souped-up compliance program helped bolster the safety of the business in various ways, with a renewed focus on compliance and ethics integrated across departments, she added.

"It was great to see the company embrace compliance so thoroughly, recognizing the broader benefits that a robust program could have on the company well beyond the investigation," she said.

WHAT MOTIVATES HER:

A primary motivator for Saperstein is the collaborative culture at Covington, which she said starts at the top.

"I get to work with incredibly smart colleagues and mentors," she said. She pointed to Donald Ridings, chair of the anti-corruption group, as someone who took her under his wing and has offered ongoing guidance.

"He gave me many opportunities early in my career," she said, citing opportunities to lead projects, conduct interviews versus second-chairing them, and other ways he helped get her in front of clients.

"I'm motivated to play the same role for associates as they navigate their careers," she added.

WHY SHE'S A COMPLIANCE ATTORNEY:

Saperstein said compliance work provides a great complement to her investigative work, allowing her to be creative and to learn about a diverse range of companies.

"I enjoy helping companies to come up with creative yet practical solutions," she said. "I also enjoy learning about the inner workings of the companies I work with. It feels like I'm always learning something new."

HOW HER PRACTICE AREA WILL CHANGE IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS:

Saperstein sees two big trends to look out for: rapid increases in the use of data and artificial intelligence, and the continued integration of compliance departments.

She noted that regulators have come to expect substantial data use among sophisticated companies. Compliance departments are often siloed into categories such as anti-corruption, antitrust, trade controls and data privacy, but companies are increasingly realizing the value of taking down those barriers, she added.

"I think you'll increasingly see companies integrate their compliance departments to take more holistic approaches to problems, for example the diligence they conduct on third parties," Saperstein said.

— *As told to Al Barbarino*

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2020 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,300 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 as of April 30, 2020, to be eligible for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.

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