

# Faces of Employment Law

Researchers estimate that the average employed person spends one-third of his or her life at work. In addition to providing our livelihoods, work helps us establish daily routines, build social networks and boost personal identity and self-esteem. It's no wonder that work-related concerns often lead to thorny legal issues that can pit employers against employees or even co-workers against each other. Enter employment lawyers whose job it is to navigate thousands of federal and state statutes, administrative regulations and judicial decisions governing employer-employee relationships and the workplace environment. Below we highlight a few LBA members who devote most of their professional time to the practice of employment law.

## Amanda R. Walker

Zoppoth Law Firm



### Why did you choose to concentrate your practice in employment law?

After law school, I worked for several small firms and solo practitioners who practiced employment law on the plaintiff's side. I was eventually offered the opportunity to create and manage an employment law practice for my present firm, which

did not have one at the time. Six years later, I still manage that practice today.

### What is your favorite aspect of your practice?

Giving a voice to clients who are up against some of the biggest employers in the state and are well known nationally. I truly enjoy interacting with my clients and being able to advocate for those who have been subjected to some pretty egregious things in the workplace.

### What is the most rewarding thing you have done in your career so far?

Helping a single mother who had been assaulted and sexually harassed by a coworker and who was ultimately terminated because of the incident. After losing her job, she didn't know how she would be able to provide for her children's basic needs. We were able to settle her case a few weeks before Christmas and I will never forget her tear-filled thanks as she explained that because of us, she would be able to buy her kids Christmas gifts that year.

### What is the biggest change you have seen in the employment law arena?

The expansion of Title VII protections to the LGBT community, especially transgender or transitioning employees. We have represented several transgender clients. These cases didn't exist when I started practicing nearly eight years ago as there was little to no legal protection afforded to these employees.

## Bobby C. Simpson

GE Lighting



### What is your favorite aspect of your practice?

The global facet of my practice with General Electric is my favorite aspect. I enjoy learning about the labor and employment laws of other jurisdictions outside the United States. While there are many similarities among various countries, the nuanced differences present interesting and fascinating legal challenges to leading a global workforce.

### What would surprise most people about your day-to-day practice?

The number of vastly different and oftentimes complex legal issues that crop up in a day might be a surprise to most people. Some days I feel like an air traffic controller handling so many different incoming legal issues. The variety and complexity keeps the practice very interesting. I am never bored and am constantly learning, which is fulfilling.

### What is the most rewarding thing you have done in your career so far?

I have practiced labor and employment law in three distinct capacities—as defense counsel in a law firm, as a civil prosecutor with a federal government agency (the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) and now as in-house counsel with a large multinational company. While each of these roles permitted me to perform exceedingly rewarding work, the most rewarding was fighting on behalf of individuals subjected to illegal employment discrimination. Employment is the cornerstone of so much in our society. Work oftentimes defines not only material success, but also an individual's self-esteem and value. Using the authority of the law to address and correct workplace discrimination, and to help give a person back his or her dignity, was very rewarding.

### What is the biggest change you have seen in the employment law arena?

The biggest change I have seen over the last 20 years or so is the manner in which labor and employment law has become a much more recognized, integral component of business success. In today's fast-paced world, business growth depends on understanding the various labor and employment laws impacting operational decisions before those decisions are made. Not so long ago, the labor and employment lawyer was somewhat ancillary to forward-looking business planning. Today, the labor and employment lawyer is brought into C-Suite level business planning to insure smooth mergers, acquisitions, divestitures and many other enterprise initiatives.

## George D. Adams

Fisher & Phillips



### What is your favorite aspect of your practice?

It centers on human interactions. Work is a significant part of a person's life, and people have strong feelings about what happens at work. I've yet to meet an employer who intentionally violated an employee's rights, but I've seen plenty get into trouble by not considering how employees might react to lawful actions. The emotions and sometimes bizarre facts involved help keep the work interesting.

### What would surprise most people about your day-to-day practice?

Probably the amount of time spent helping clients comply with the myriad labor and employment laws without compromising commercial success, as opposed to time spent defending clients against employees' claims. People often visualize employers as greedy, faceless corporations that are eager to exploit employees. In fact, every business is run by ordinary people. Most of them consider employees an investment and want to keep them happy. Employers who seek our help to foster positive employee relations are less likely to need our help defending themselves against employees' claims.

### What is the most rewarding thing you have done in your career so far?

Helping a client assist an employee who was terminally ill, had exhausted all leave, could not work, had minimal resources and was becoming non-communicative. My client had no legal duty to give her anything but a pink slip, but she had been a good employee and they wanted to help her. We helped them offer her a severance package, found an attorney to represent her and included her attorney's fees in the agreement. The employee died a few months later, but the severance pay eased her burden and her family members and other employees have never forgotten the employer's kindness.

### What is the biggest change you have seen in the employment law arena?

Americans' attitudes toward private sector unions. Twenty-eight states now have a right-to-work law—a 33 percent increase since I began practicing. During the same period, private sector employees represented by unions have declined from 9.0 to 6.5 percent, a decrease nearly as great as the increase in right-to-work states.

## R. Joseph Stennis

Wyatt Tarrant & Combs



### Why did you choose to concentrate your practice in employment law?

During my last semester of law school, I took employment law as an elective and really enjoyed the class. About a year and a half into my practice at a defense firm, I began handling employment litigation cases. Since that time, I have never looked back. Employment

law—particularly defending companies regarding discrimination and wage and hour claims—is now the majority of my practice.

### What is your favorite aspect of your practice?

I would say getting to know and understand my client's business model. By having a good sense of a company's business structure, job duties and various department areas, the more efficient I can be in providing legal services.

### What would surprise most people about your day-to-day practice?

The practice of law generally is not as glamorous as it is typically portrayed on television. There is no mystique per se in drafting an answer to a complaint. Discovery is a tedious process that can require hours of combing through documents and, of course, taking depositions. I think most non-lawyers would be surprised at the amount of writing involved in my practice.

### What is the biggest change you have seen in the employment law arena?

That is the beauty of employment law—it is always evolving! Recently the #metoo movement has put a much needed focus on sexual assault of women in the workplace. Recent rulings in various federal jurisdictions that workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act are sure to make their way to the Supreme Court. Kentucky becoming a right-to-work state is an interesting development to follow to see how our state economy will be impacted.

## Callie E. Walton

Gwin Steinmetz & Baird



### Why did you choose to concentrate your practice in employment law?

The first case I litigated was a sexual harassment claim. When we finished the case, it was clear to me that if we hadn't helped, the client may not have received any recovery for the lost employment and damaging treatment, and the employer may have continued the discriminatory behavior. I felt we made a difference that would last for the client and the employer. That stuck with me and I wanted to continue on that path.

### What is your favorite aspect of your practice?

I enjoy the challenge and variety of employment law. The claims are often difficult, but each is as unique as the clients I've had the privilege to represent. Not only do you get to know the person, but you also learn about their personalities, life goals and the skills they used in their employment.

### What would surprise most people about your day-to-day practice?

Unfortunately, I think many people would be surprised that the people I speak with aren't looking for money. What they really want is to be heard, treated fairly and advised of their rights even if that doesn't include a legal claim.

### What is the most rewarding thing you have done in your career so far?

When a client brings a case to a close, no matter what the outcome, the relief for them is extreme. The reward is getting to be part of that relief.

## Don C. Meade

Priddy Cutler Naake & Meade



### Why did you choose to concentrate your practice in employment law?

My first love was labor law, discovered while doing a clerkship with GE's labor lawyers at Appliance Park, at the time a huge manufac-

turing plant with robust union-management relations. Drawn to the working people and the union cause, I decided to pursue that as a career. Employment law in the non-union setting was just emerging with the passage of a series of employee protection statutes.

### What is your favorite aspect of your practice?

Collaborating with union leadership to keep the labor-management relationship vital and productive. I also enjoy problem-solving with other lawyers, whether partners or opponents, as we figure out how to advance our causes in the rough and tumble world of litigation, conflict and compromise.

### What is the most rewarding thing you have done in your career so far?

The freedom of private practice, for all the hardships and risks it involves, has afforded me the opportunity to explore the halls of government power, dive deep into the regulatory process, make a difference in the legislative process, participate in the political process, stand on the picket line, pour out my heart before juries and be molded and forced to grow as a result of it all.

### What is the biggest change you have seen in the employment law arena?

The triumph of capitalism over unions and collective bargaining, which are an essential component to counter the inequitable distribution of wealth that is now eroding our politics, culture and country.

## Jared A Cox

Bingham Greenebaum Doll



### Why did you choose to concentrate your practice in employment law?

The em-

ployers I represent are a critical part of our community and other communities throughout the Midwest and Southeast. They support not only their employees, but charitable and other important causes wherever they may be located. I view my job as ensuring that they have the right policies in place and are doing the right things so they can continue to excel in the products or services they provide and continue supporting their employees and communities.

### What would surprise most people about your day-to-day practice?

As a lawyer who generally represents employers, I think what would surprise most people is that they genuinely care about their employees and want to create a fulfilling work environment. A company is simply a collection of people working together to accomplish the same goals. The employers I work with seek practical and reasonable ways to improve not only their service or product, but also the morale and well-being of their employees.

### What is the biggest change you have seen in the employment law arena?

It is not so much what has changed, but what has been forgotten. The clients I represent can find themselves subject to a lawsuit simply for making real-time, difficult decisions they felt they needed to make in order for their businesses to function properly. I would like to see a renewed dedication in the law to appreciating the challenges and decisions that employers face every day.