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CHANGE AGENTS

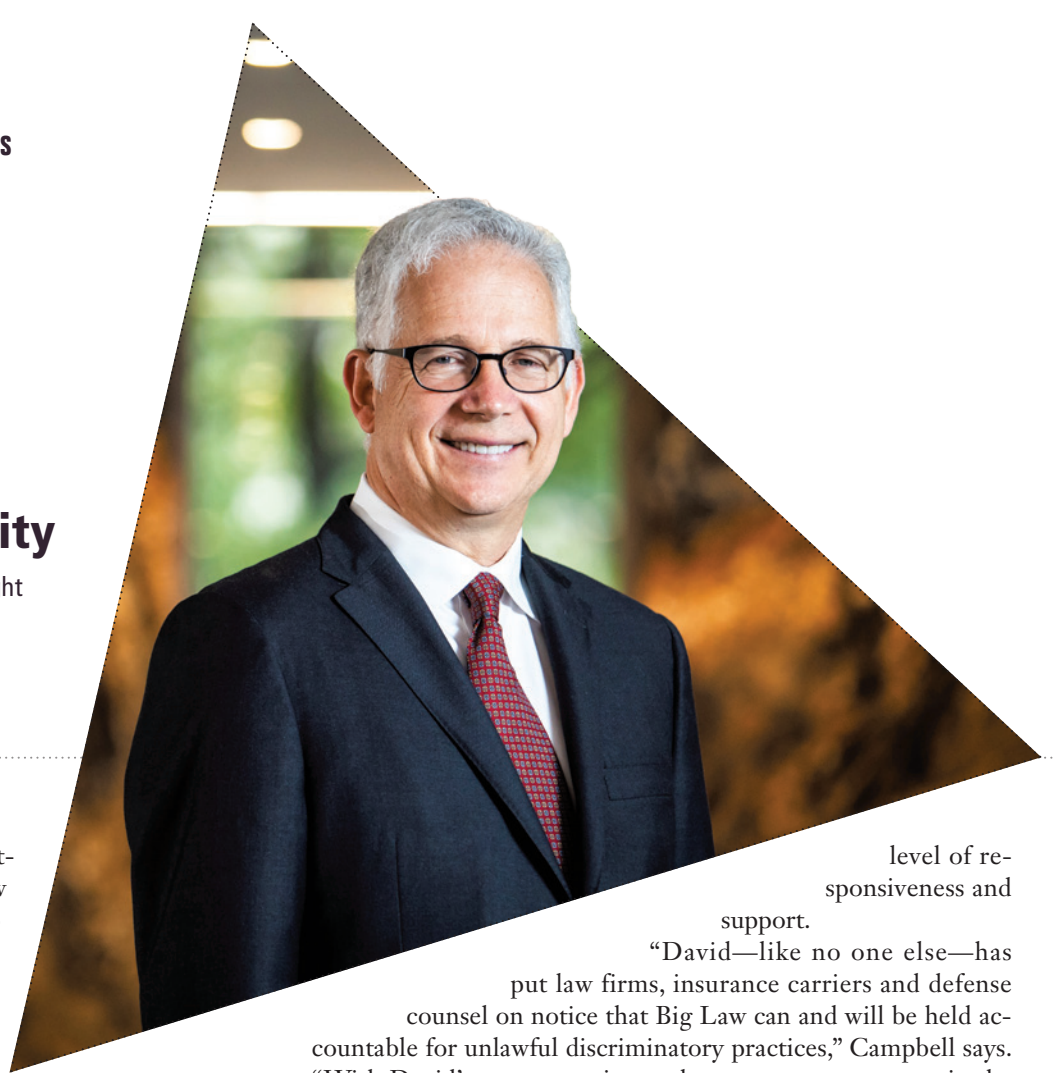
Our Attorney of the Year finalists are helping to move the legal industry forward.

David Sanford, left, Grace Speights and Bill Deckelman

BY SCOTT FLAHERTY

A Force for Equality

David Sanford is helping women fight against the wage gap.



BEFORE DAVID SANFORD BEGAN litigating gender bias claims against large law firms, he didn't have any master plan to effect change for women in the legal profession, he says. But after several high-profile cases, and settlements worth millions of dollars, his work has shined a light on Big Law's gender gap and helped to chip away at stubborn inequality.

Sanford, chairman of the class action firm Sanford Heisler Sharp, has guided several female partners who felt they were given short shrift at their firms to settlements with the likes of Chadbourne & Parke (now part of Norton Rose Fulbright), the now-collapsed Sedgwick and Proskauer Rose. He's also lead counsel on similar cases pending against Jones Day, Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak & Stewart and others.

Sanford says "there is absolutely no doubt" those cases impacted the legal industry, exposing potential discrimination and the ways in which opaque partner compensation systems can contribute to the pay gap.

"There's a sea change that has occurred in the legal profession, I believe, based on the activities of our firm in assisting female attorneys, mostly female partners, to get the pay that they deserve," Sanford says.

His work as lead counsel on the law firm gender cases unmistakably raised awareness about the Big Law gender gap, says Kerrie Campbell of K-Campbell Law, the lead plaintiff in the Chadbourne suit, which ended with a \$3 million settlement for her and two other former Chadbourne partners.

Campbell explains that threats of litigation, public scrutiny in the press and potential high-dollar payouts have upended the status quo at large law firms. She credits Sanford's approach as a lawyer who can "go toe-to-toe with any marquee defense firm" while also providing his clients with an "extraordinarily rare"

level of responsiveness and support.

"David—like no one else—has put law firms, insurance carriers and defense counsel on notice that Big Law can and will be held accountable for unlawful discriminatory practices," Campbell says. "With David's representation and support, more women in the legal industry than ever before have come forward and taken a stand against unlawful and discriminatory conduct."

Sanford recognizes the important role of the women he has represented—women who have been willing to take their bias claims public, even in the face of professional or reputational harm. While that position can be an exceptionally difficult one, Sanford says his clients tend to resolve their cases for large sums of money, and have been able to continue their careers with success.

The cases have brought a much-needed focus, he says, on compensation systems at law firms, which often place outside power in the hands of firm leaders who are more likely to be men than women. Law firms can do better with their pay and promotion decisions, he says.

"One of the things that our litigation matters shows is that firms have a deep-rooted problem because they are unwilling, to date, to have the kind of transparency and sharing of information that is typically required of firms with shareholders," Sanford says. "For the first time there is a lot of discussion among people in power in law firms ... about what to do, either to avoid this kind of action, or in light of it."

When the industry falls short, Sanford and his firm will be watching.

"There's a lot more work to be done," Sanford says, "and we're going to be doing a lot of that work."

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