MVP: Sanford Heisler's David Sanford

Law360 (November 27, 2018, 10:26 AM EST) -- David Sanford
of Sanford Heisler Sharp LLP helped a former Columbia University
professor, who said she was denied tenure after complaining a
colleague sexually harassed her, win a $1.25 million damages
award this year, and also represented female attorneys accusing
large law firms of gender bias, earning him a place as one
of Law360's 2018 Employment MVPs.

HIS BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS YEAR:
Sanford worked on a number of cases this past year. For one, he
represented three female lawyers alleging that Chadbourne &
Parke LLP, which merged with Norton Rose Fulbright last year,
systematically underpaid women — a case that was settled in
March for $3.1 million.

However, Sanford said his biggest challenge this year
was representing former Columbia University professor Enrichetta
Ravina at trial, where a jury in July found that the former
colleague she accused of sexually harassing her owed $500,000 in
punitive damages and that he and the school owed $750,000 in
compensatory damages on Ravina's successful retaliation claims.

David Sanford
Sanford Heisler

"The Ravina case was particularly challenging, because we faced two law firms representing Columbia
University and the professor who was also a named defendant. It was challenging throughout the
litigation, which lasted two and a half years and included 20 depositions and numerous expert witnesses
on each side. It involved a three-week trial in federal court and it continues as we speak, because there
are post-trial motions and a potential appeal that Columbia will file," he said. "All that put together
made the verdict we received particularly gratifying."

HIS BIGGEST ACCOMPLISHMENT THIS YEAR:
In terms of the biggest impact, he said it wasn't one case or one verdict from the past year.

Sanford said there is inequity in how female lawyers are treated at big firms compared to men, unequal distribution of pay to female partners and unfair and discriminatory promotion practices from nonequity to equity partnership, and that shining a light on those issues has the greatest impact.

"There are systemic problems that impact big law just as there are systemic problems that impact corporate America," he said. "And those problems are overlapping and consistent problems that we see."

WHY HE IS AN EMPLOYMENT ATTORNEY:

Sanford said he loves what he does, helping out clients who face some of the most challenging and sensitive of circumstances. Those cases come with a wide range of issues, he said, such as reputation, finances, medical health and relationship issues.

"It goes to the core of who we are in society and it deals with extreme emotions on each side," he said. "And to get a resolution that works for our clients, and hopefully through pre-suit negotiations work for both our client and the other side, is all particularly satisfying."

WHAT MOTIVATES HIM:

Sanford said he finds motivation in representing people who find themselves disadvantaged in their circumstances and where there is typically an extreme power imbalance between them and their adversary.

"To be able to level that playing field gives our clients a chance to be heard and recognized often for the first time," he said.

HIS ADVICE FOR JUNIOR ATTORNEYS:

While acknowledging it is a common saying, Sanford said it is important for people to follow their passions — something he said is true in the realm of law.

He said it is important to try to find your passion earlier in your law career, because as you move forward professionally it becomes harder.

"I see so many applicants to our firm who are applying from big law or corporate America who are dissatisfied with their professional lives and recognized sometimes too late that the path they have chosen does not allow them to fulfill their ideals and their passions," he said.

— As told to Adam Lidgett

Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2018 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 1,000 submissions.