

SURBHI SARASWAT GOYAL

Making a Difference for Workers' Comp Respondents, Others

by Dan Rafter

Watsonville, California-based Monterey Mushrooms provides its namesake produce to restaurants and grocery stores across the country. But when the company faces workers' compensation claims in Illinois, it turns to Surbhi Saraswat Goyal, a partner with Chicago law firm Brady, Connolly & Masuda PC.

Why? Toni Allen, Monterey Mushrooms' director of industrial relations, says Goyal is passionate about defending the company against these claims. Goyal boasts an in-depth knowledge of workers' compensation law. And, Allen adds, no one ever outworks Goyal, and no attorney is more prepared to tackle a case.

Allen should know. She is an attorney, too. She recognizes top legal skills when she sees them.

"Surbhi is always on top of our cases," Allen says. "There is never a lag time. That is great for us. I can call up and ask Surbhi to look at something, and I know it'll get done."

Even better, says Allen, is that Goyal takes the cases she handles personally. She never goes through the motions when representing Monterey Mushrooms.

"She takes these cases to heart," Allen says. "She is fighting for us to get the best results. It's not just a job. She's not just going through the motions. The other side always knows they aren't going to run over her. Whether it's a big or small case, they all get treated with the same scrutiny and care."

Allen isn't alone. Goyal has been practicing law for more than 13 years. That's not a particularly long time. But this hasn't stopped her from building a long list of satisfied clients, including Lutheran Life Communities, GEO Group and FedEx. These clients turn to her when facing often complex workers' compensation claims.

In addition to her well-documented legal talents, Goyal brings a unique perspective to this work. She formerly represented petitioners in workers' compensation cases and plaintiffs in personal injury cases. This experience helps Goyal today, giving her a better understanding



of the strategies that her opponents might use. Thanks in part to this knowledge, Goyal has become known for crafting creative strategies when representing her clients, strategies that frequently lead to positive results.

LEGAL PHILOSOPHY OPENS THE DOOR

What's interesting about Goyal, though, is that despite her knack for getting these results and her obvious passion for the law, she didn't always dream of becoming an attorney. As an undergraduate, Goyal majored in psychology. It wasn't until she took a legal philosophy class during her undergraduate years that Goyal seriously considered a career in law. That class, then, helped change her career path.

Goyal has always been interested in people and how they mesh to form a society. She points to the law as a type of safety net for people. Access to legal resources helps people feel secure and protected, she says.

This idea intrigued Goyal, and she immediately wanted to learn even more about the law and how it affects communities and their citizens.

"That legal philosophy class was my first exposure to the theory of law," Goyal says. "It was so intriguing to me. Our theory of law is so important to the fabric of our culture. Whether people have access to legal resources or don't have access to them is relevant to all of us. That class inspired me to pursue this career."

Goyal earned her law degree from Chicago-

Kent College of Law. And since then, she has earned respect from both her clients and her fellow attorneys.

The reasons for her success? Goyal's peers point to her work ethic, knowledge of the law and passion for earning the best results for her clients.

It helps, too, they say, that no one is ever more prepared for cases.

Sarah Schroeder, resolution manager for Rolling Meadows-based third-party insurance company Gallagher Bassett, has worked with Goyal, who has served as the company's defense attorney for more than three years. Schroeder would never hesitate to recommend Goyal to anyone.

"She has such great communication skills and is very open and honest," Schroeder says. "What's really impressive, though, is that she can defend her opinions six ways to Sunday. She has an opinion, and she has a reason for that opinion. It's never some vague 'I think this.' She can always explain her reasoning for all parties involved."

Being a defense lawyer in the state of Illinois is far from an easy task, Schroeder says. This makes Goyal's record an even more impressive one, she adds.

Schroeder says that during conference calls Goyal does some of her most important work with clients and lays the groundwork to boost her already winning legal record.

"Lots of times, she and I are on the same

page, but the client doesn't understand," Schroeder says. "Surbhi is always great on those calls. She knows what questions are going to be asked and addressed when we are in front of an arbitrator. She never says she'll need to get back to us with answers. She always has the answers. That helps us get to a good resolution so much faster."

CHANGING BUSINESS AND HER FIRM

Like all attorneys, earning the best results for her clients is satisfying to Goyal. As she says, all litigators want to earn great results, and all are motivated by those successes.

But there's more to Goyal's career than wins. As a successful attorney, Goyal can bring real change to both the business world and her own law firm. She can help the companies she represents thrive and can mentor young attorneys at Brady, Connolly & Masuda.

"It's more about the larger picture and what a career in law provides me in terms of access and having a voice in my firm," Goyal says. "I feel I can do something not only for myself but also for my clients and the people I mentor here at the firm. That is what is most satisfying to me, bringing about the change I want to see in how people work, how companies work and how law firms work."

Goyal points to the work she does mentoring younger attorneys as an example. She has benefitted from great mentors her entire life, people who cared about her and helped her navigate the often-complex world of the law. Because of this, she knows how important it is to have this kind of help.

As Goyal says, the mentoring she received was invaluable to her career. She owes it to other attorneys, then, to do the same.

Mentoring has long been encouraged at Brady, Connolly & Masuda. And Goyal is committed to it, too.

"Our firm is progressive. People sometimes say women should mentor other women. One of the things I like at our firm, though, is that we don't look at it that way. We believe anyone can mentor anyone.

"I have had male mentors. Except for my mother, all my mentors have been men. I mentor both women and men. I find there are various ways to relate to people, to find out what is working and what is not working for people."

Goyal can offer the younger attorneys at her firm plenty of valuable advice. That's partly because she, too, has a relatively young legal career.

As Goyal says, the way companies do business and employees work today is changing. Millennials have changed even the way legal firms work. Goyal sees her role as serving as

a bridge between her firm's younger attorneys and the firm's more established partners.

DRIVING PROGRESS, SECURING WINS

"I want to be the person who can explain the policies and why they are what they are or why they should be changed," Goyal says. "I want to be the person who drives our progress and the growth of our firm."

Goyal's mentoring doesn't just take place at her own firm. This attorney has mentored members of area bar associations and even some of her clients who are on the younger side. Goyal has also learned plenty from her clients who boast more experience in the business world.

Goyal, though, would not be considered one of the city's top young attorneys if she lacked a history of winning results. She has this and then some.

Goyal points to a case she tried about four years ago. She represented a company in a workers' compensation case. The petitioner filed a claim against Goyal's client. But the petitioner did not report any injuries or incidents until that worker had first been fired.

“I want to be the person who can explain the policies and why they are what they are or why they should be changed.”

"My client was willing to pay if the claim was legitimate," Goyal says. "If there really is an injury or illness, you take care of people. My clients believe that. But when there isn't a real injury or illness there, or there is something fishy about it, that gets my goat. That is also why the law is there. It is there to protect people, of course, but it is also there to protect employers from people who file false claims."

Goyal helped prove at trial that the former employee was making a false claim against her client. She relied on several witnesses to buttress the case and argued for her client passionately. She submitted complex briefs supporting her client's position.

And in the end, Goyal successfully protected her client.

"It was wonderful to be vindicated," Goyal says. "That really does sum up my day-to-day job. I am here to make sure that the protections of law that exist for all of us are also protecting my clients."

The most successful attorneys tend to have certain character traits. Goyal, of course, possesses these. Goyal says she has always been a vocal and outspoken person. She is not afraid

of hard work and doing the research necessary to prepare for a case.

Goyal also possesses a sense of integrity and honesty. Her clients trust her to do right for them. That has helped Goyal build a deep roster of loyal clients.

"Ask my mother. I have always been a very outspoken person," says Goyal. "That remains true today. It's a wonderful quality in lawyers and most certainly in litigators."

SPEAKING UP TO RIGHT WRONGS

"People look to us for answers and take our word when we give them those answers. That is kind of amazing. The only other professionals for which people do that is doctors. To be a successful lawyer, you need to be the kind of person who has a strong sense of integrity and an ability to speak up when things aren't right."

Of course, the field still presents Goyal with challenges. The biggest? Balancing the demands of her work life with the need to carve out some personal time away from the law.

To build a busy legal career, you must be willing to sacrifice a good portion of your free time, Goyal says. To achieve the traditional markers of success—money, status and reputation—you'll spend plenty of hours in the courtroom and the office.

"I think the best advice for any lawyer is to be mindful and thoughtful of what you really want from this career," Goyal says. "Don't just haphazardly say you want the money and the success just because everyone else wants it. You need to understand that building a career comes with some sacrifices."

Another challenge? Law firms can be sluggish to react when technology changes or when workers seek improvements in office life.

"The legal field can be pretty slow to change, and that remains a challenge to all of us," Goyal says. "One of the things I like about being in law is I have that voice at my firm. It is very gratifying to me. We are trying to make those changes. We are being progressive with our policies and our day-to-day operations. It's good to be part of that. It's challenging but good."

Goyal is a fine example of a successful attorney who knows how to balance her work and personal lives. When not working, she enjoys travel. One of her goals is to visit a new place or country every year. This year, that means a trip with her husband to Hawaii.

"I love traveling. It's not just for the relaxation, but to satisfy my curiosity. I like to learn about other people, countries and histories. I'm very fortunate to get to do this."

Goyal's all-time favorite vacation destination? Costa Rica. Not only is the country beautiful, but so are the people, she says. They taught her valuable lessons about being peaceful and satisfied with life. ■