



Profile: Bill Jhaveri-Weeks

Employment-law attorney enjoys setting the culture at his own firm, helping clients who come to him in times of crisis

By **STEPHEN ELLISON**

His may not have been a conventional path to plaintiffs' law and firm ownership, but Bill Jhaveri-Weeks did what he had to do to make good on a career he envisioned when he first chose the legal profession.

The founder and principal of The Jhaveri-Weeks Firm in San Francisco said he prides himself on setting the culture in his office and relishes the opportunity to mentor others. And after graduating from Yale College and NYU Law School, he went from a large New York firm to a small San Francisco outfit before hanging his own shingle. The tight-knit atmosphere of his own boutique firm suits him just fine.

"It was an incredible contrast, going from this firm in New York to a small plaintiff-side firm," he recalled when talking about his journey to the Bay Area. "Just for context, when I started at the firm in New York, I was one of a hundred lawyers coming from law school to start there. So, the firm itself must have had seven- or eight-hundred lawyers. And then when I moved out here, the first firm that I worked for had three lawyers, including me.

"Then, I pretty quickly switched to this plaintiff-side class action firm that had about maybe 10 or 12 lawyers," he continued. "So, it's a completely different experience. As an associate at a large law firm, I was usually one lawyer among five or six on each case, and I would get to work on little bits and pieces of the case while the more senior lawyers would be actually doing depositions and arguing motions and things like that. You have a whole support ecosystem of paralegals and a filing department and a marketing department. ... When I switched to the



Jhaveri-Weeks

plaintiff side, especially at a very small firm, it was just a handful of lawyers and maybe an assistant. For the most part, I really loved that. It was a real shock when I started, but to be able to

learn how to do everything yourself and to get experience even as a junior lawyer; arguing motions and taking depositions and making decisions in cases, it's really like trial by fire. You learn much faster, and you have a lot more control and agency over your work and your schedule."

Indeed, not long after he arrived on the West Coast, Jhaveri-Weeks established himself as an associate employment-law attorney doing class-actions with *Goldstein, Borgen, Dardarian & Ho* in Oakland and worked his way up to partner there in about a year. But just two years later, and not without apprehension, he had designs on being his own boss.

He said the decision to leave the firm where he had grown into a well-known employment-law attorney was not an easy one. He had a great relationship with his colleagues, and the firm itself genuinely was one where he could have built a fine career, he said. But he wanted the challenge of developing his own firm that would do a mix of class action and individual cases, and he wanted to see if he could build that firm his way, with a culture he preferred. The verdict: So far, so good.

"It's been seven years, and I have two colleagues right now, two more junior

lawyers," he explained. "And I really love it. I love being able to choose my clients, and when I end up with the difficult clients, I have nobody but myself to blame. That's just a better feeling than having someone else tell you who you have to spend your time representing.

"I love being able to set the culture of our firm," he continued. "I feel like when I worked at a large corporate firm, the quality of the work product was very good, so I've tried to bring that level of quality into all my work since then, including with my firm – teaching my two colleagues about how our work product is going to be. Then, learning the business side of being a successful lawyer has been interesting and a great challenge."

That skill wasn't one Jhaveri-Weeks had given much thought until he was about eight years out of law school. He started by learning how class-action lawyers find their cases, and he discovered it's an entrepreneurial type of practice. Certain lawyers have a nose for generating good cases and connecting with potential clients. Others have a knack coming up with ideas for cases and then connecting with people who want to bring those cases, he said.

"I have done both of those things, and now I'm teaching those skills to my junior colleagues," he said. "I try to teach them both of those things and encourage them to do both of those things, even as junior lawyers."

Big and small

Jhaveri-Weeks was born and raised in Columbus, Ohio, where his father was a Legal Aid lawyer. He went to Yale for his undergraduate studies, graduating cum laude with a bachelor's degree in history. At that point, he was thinking about going into academia, but he said it felt



too disconnected from the real world. So, he chose law because it was “sort of scholarly,” and he would be able to help real people, he said.

At New York University School of Law, he continued to excel academically, graduating magna cum laude. But the time had come again to make a big decision.

“I was planning to do public interest work after law school, and then, once I took on all the debt, I decided to work at a big law firm for a while to pay off my debt,” Jhaveri-Weeks said. “I practiced for four years at a large corporate firm in New York, just doing general litigation and paid off my loans. At that point, I had settled on plaintiffs’ side work because I felt like it had a social justice element to it. But it also had the potential to make a good living.”

After leaving the big New York firm, he took a year to clerk for a Federal Court of Appeals judge in Ohio. At around that time, he met the woman who would become his wife.

While they were still dating, the couple decided on a change of scenery – literally and figuratively – and a visit with some of their friends in San Francisco made the decision to relocate so much easier, Jhaveri-Weeks said. They fell in love with the city and took a flyer. Jhaveri-Weeks interviewed with multiple plaintiffs’ firms in the Bay Area and landed a job with the *Goldstein* firm in the East Bay.

A balanced niche

That was when he became immersed in employment law, mostly on class-action cases. These days, with Jhaveri-Weeks calling the shots, his firm’s caseload consists of about 95% employment law, he said, and they’re split evenly between class actions focused on wage-and-hour claims and individual cases involving discrimination, harassment and retaliation.

“Our firm has done a series of class actions on behalf of adjunct professors at private universities throughout California – that’s been a big part of our class-action practice,” he said. “Then among the

REDIRECT:

Getaway Spot: Kauai

Go-To Music or Artist: Thelonious Monk

Recommended Reading: “The Elements of Style” by Strunk and White

Dream Job: Plaintiff’s Employment Lawyer

Words to Live By: “Only women can be investors.” (My wife is an investor, and we asked our 4-year-old son if he’d like to be an investor someday.)

individual cases, we’ve handled a lot of sexual harassment and pregnancy discrimination cases, race discrimination and harassment ... commission disputes and whistleblower cases.

“It’s so focused on the experience of the workplace and the relationship between employers and employees, and that’s such a universal experience,” Jhaveri-Weeks said when asked how employment law cases differ most from other plaintiffs’ law cases. “Everybody’s got a job, everybody has an employer or has employees. Contrast that with personal injury where, thankfully, most people don’t have to experience that. But employment law is in everybody’s life, and most people run into situations where they have conflicts at work. It can be life changing for people. Their whole identity is wrapped up in their work and their livelihood and ability to survive. So, every day with our clients, those are the issues that we’re focused on.”

Some high-profile cases Jhaveri-Weeks and his firm have worked on recently include a class action against National University representing adjunct professors in California. The professors accused the university of violating labor law by not reimbursing them for the costs of teaching students from their homes during the pandemic, according to online publication Top Class Actions. Jhaveri-Weeks obtained a \$925,000 settlement, which amounted to as much as \$7,500 for each of the professors.

The firm also co-counseled with Rudy, Exelrod, Zieff & Lowe on six individual sexual-harassment cases

against Tesla in which women working at the electric carmaker’s Fremont factory alleged they were subjected to male coworkers frequently referencing their bodies and clothing. Some of the women said management moved them from their workstations after they reported the behavior, according to the lawsuit. In all six cases, Jhaveri-Weeks defeated Tesla’s appeals to compel arbitration.

When thinking about memorable cases or the ones he’s most proud of, Jhaveri-Weeks said it’s less about the type or size of case and more about the client.

“We represent people from all walks of life, from the most sophisticated and savvy to the most vulnerable and naive,” he said. “They come to us in times of crisis, and it is an honor to get to know them and help them enforce their rights. Litigation is about the story of what happened to someone, so what we remember and what we’re proud of when we look back at our cases is how we’ve told people’s stories to someone who can actually deliver them justice.”

On an even keel

When he’s not working, Jhaveri-Weeks stays active with his wife and two young sons, ages 8 and 5. He enjoys having dinner with them and hanging out in the evenings and on weekends. They also have done some traveling together, including trips to France and Italy, he said, as well as treks to Hawaii and to skiing resorts.

For a few hours every Saturday morning, he carves out some time for himself, organizing and playing in a pickup soccer game in San Francisco.

“It’s an amazing pickup game,” he said. “There’s something like 20 different nationalities represented, and I think most of the players there played soccer in college – and there’s a couple who played professionally. It’s just for fun, but it’s really high level.”

On his advice or wisdom to young lawyers or law students, Jhaveri-Weeks said he has a lot of thoughts, including



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one based on his own experiences when he first started out: Those hints of self-doubt and discontent will fade, and things will get better.

“In my experience, being a young lawyer was really difficult, and it seemed like a lot of young lawyers, especially in litigation, question whether it really could be a satisfying or happy career path,” he explained. “I found as I get more senior, I like it more and more. It’s hard for

young lawyers to know what different paths are out there as options for a legal career and to know what those different paths are like. So, try to talk with older lawyers about the different paths that people have taken and how lawyers have found happiness on those paths. And don’t be discouraged if you’re feeling stressed, because it’s unavoidable.

“If you actually care about being a good lawyer and doing a good job, then

you will be stressed, and you will be worried that you’re doing something wrong,” he continued. “It becomes more fun and more satisfying as you get more senior and you have more skills in your toolkit. That’s what I kind of wish someone had told me when I was a younger lawyer.”

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