

THE NATIONAL LAW JOURNAL

The Decade's Most Influential Lawyers

March 19, 2010

These are the lawyers who've defined a decade.

For our annual Most Influential Lawyers special report, the editors of The National Law Journal have selected 40 attorneys in a dozen key legal areas whose work between Jan. 1, 2000, and Dec. 31, 2009, was so consequential that it helped to push the profession, an industry or a practice area substantially forward.



Mark Lanier of
The Lanier Law Firm

The lawyers were selected through our staff's reporting, as well as from more than 100 nominations submitted by the legal community. Associate Editor Leigh Jones valiantly spearheaded the effort, sifting through mounds of material to help us come to our difficult, final decisions. NLJ reporters Tresa Baldas, Amanda Bronstad, Jenna Greene, David Ingram, Jeff Jeffrey, Andy Jones, Carrie Levine, Sheri Qualters, Mike Scarcella, Karen Sloan and Jordan Weissmann contributed to this report.

The list spans law firms, academia, government and advocacy groups, but, consciously subtracts a few obvious categories: Members of the Supreme Court and attorneys general, for instance, are generally influential by definition, and they are not included here.

Instead, we have focused upon lawyers in the following specific practices: antitrust; appellate; bankruptcy; civil rights; corporate; energy and environmental; in-house; intellectual property; labor and employment; legal education; litigation; and regulatory. In other words, we're primarily focusing on hard-working lawyers who've been in the trenches on big deals or major litigation or who have been pioneering at in-house positions or the nation's law schools.

This week's edition isn't the last word on our Most Influential list. During the next several weeks, we will produce video profiles of some of our selections for NLJ.com. And we'll be honoring all of the attorneys on this year's list at The National Law Journal's annual dinner, which is slated for June 15 at The Gotham in New York City. We hope that you'll join us.

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(continued from pg 1)

In 2005, Mark Lanier won a stunning \$253.5 million jury verdict in what was then the first Vioxx case to go to trial against Merck & Co. To get set for trial, the Houston-based plaintiffs' lawyer called an unusual expert to help his team prepare. Lanier, 49, brought in Cliff Atkinson, author of the how-to guide to PowerPoint, Beyond Bullet Points. "I like to think beyond the legal skill set," said Lanier. His creativity obviously paid off at trial.

The verdict was shot down by a Texas appeals court in 2008 and even if Lanier prevails in his appeal to the Texas Supreme Court, the award would be capped at \$26.1 million under a Texas law limiting punitive damages awards. But Lanier's successful verdict touched off a wave of litigation that culminated in the November 2007 announcement by Merck that it would pay \$4.45 billion to settle most of its Vioxx docket.

It also made Lanier a superstar among plaintiffs' lawyers. During the past 10 years, he has put his flair for legal showmanship and meticulous preparation to work in hundreds of wins that brought clients \$1 million or more. This year is already shaping up to be a good one for Lanier. His firm is handling more than 1,000 products liability cases stemming from the recent recalls of some of Toyota's best-selling cars. And in January, Lanier won a \$56.3 million jury verdict against Caterpillar Inc. and Holt Texas Ltd. for a construction worker who was paralyzed while using a piece of Caterpillar equipment.

"We're definitely staying busy," Lanier said.