

Shaping Society for the Better

An Interview with Brad S. Karp, Chairman, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison

EDITORS' NOTE *Chairman of the firm since 2008, Brad Karp is one of the country's leading lawyers and corporate advisers. He has extensive experience successfully defending financial institutions and other companies in "bet the company" litigations and regulatory matters.*

FIRM BRIEF *Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison (paulweiss.com) is a firm of more than 1,000 lawyers with diverse backgrounds, personalities, ideas and interests who collaboratively provide innovative solutions to their clients' most critical and complex legal and business challenges. Paul, Weiss represents the world's largest public and privately held corporations and investors, as well as clients in need of pro bono assistance.*



Brad S. Karp

Judge Rifkind's statement of firm principles is inscribed prominently on our website, and we continue to abide by those principles today. Our dedication to pro bono and to diversity, equity and inclusion is a big part of what makes Paul, Weiss such a special place to work and it's why many of us joined the firm in the first place. We also share core values of collaboration, mutual respect and professionalism, and we try to incorporate those values into all that we do.

How do you define the role of a law firm today and has the role become more about being a business partner for clients as opposed to solely providing legal counsel?

At Paul, Weiss, we have always viewed our role as helping our clients solve their most important legal and business challenges, but the past two decades have seen a rapid change in the law firm-client relationship, and the expectations imposed on our firm have also evolved.

A generation ago, large law firms paid scant attention to the value they produced for the hours billed, and the default was that major client relationships were passed down between partners. Fast forward to today, where consumers of legal services are in the driver's seat, determining the value of legal matters, who will provide legal services, how the services are provided, and at what cost. The law firm-client relationship is considerably less "sticky." To be successful – to have our clients turn to us again and again – we need to be not just legal advisors, but true business partners. Excellence in client service remains vitally important, but we need to continually demonstrate how our work offers a compelling value proposition. We

need to approach each matter more commercially and focus on providing solutions, not just presenting advice. We need to deeply understand our clients' business goals, professional culture, key stakeholders and risk tolerance.

How do you differentiate Paul, Weiss from its peers in the industry and what do you feel is the Paul, Weiss advantage?

Paul, Weiss is a firm with a unique combination of exceptional client service and unshakable commitment to social justice. We are unusually outspoken within the legal industry on issues of critical national interest, whether we are challenging racially motivated violence or state voter disenfranchisement laws or working to safeguard reproductive rights. This combination is a compelling advantage for us in the market for talent and with many clients, who appreciate our unique identity.

Another important differentiator is that we know our strengths and we stick to our knitting. We don't try to be all things to all clients, but rather we focus on five areas where we lead the market: public M&A, private equity, litigation, white collar and regulatory defense, and restructuring.

At the same time, we are continually evolving to meet our clients' needs – in fact, we go out of our comfort zone to meet them. That responsiveness is why we were the first major law firm to launch a dedicated Sustainability & ESG Advisory practice in April 2020, and why we opened up a new office in San Francisco in January 2021, our first in 11 years.

Will you highlight Paul, Weiss' commitment to building a diverse and inclusive workforce and how the firm is reaching diverse talent in its recruitment efforts?

Cultivating a diverse community is, and always has been, a crucial ingredient in our success and firm culture. Making space for

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“Paul, Weiss has always been a purpose-driven law firm. Our commitment to break down cultural barriers began a century ago, when Louis Weiss and John Wharton joined forces, creating the first New York firm where Jews and Gentiles practiced side by side.”

different worldviews both enriches our experience and leads to more effective and creative solutions for our clients. As we all know, building a diverse and inclusive workforce requires commitment over the long run. While we continue to make progress in recruiting diverse talent, there is still much more work to be done. The challenges we face are not unique to our firm, but we are committed to continuing to lead in this area. Three years ago, we created an Inclusion Task Force, co-chaired by me, Deputy Chair Valerie Radwaner and Litigation Department Co-Chair Ted Wells, to tackle this issue head on and make structural changes aimed at transforming the experience of our associates, with a particular focus on our diverse and women associates. That generated scores of initiatives, which we have implemented.

Within the firm, we are also collaborating with our Black Lawyers Network and our other affinity-based networks to enhance the way we recruit, retain, mentor and advance diverse lawyers. So, for instance, we have increased the number of historically Black colleges and universities where we are recruiting talent, and that effort is already a big success. We have expanded our partnerships with nonprofit organizations to focus on creating a larger pool of diverse talent by demystifying the legal profession for students as young as junior high and high school. Finally, we have increased the number of diversity scholarships or stipends that we offer in partnership with these organizations or through our own hiring process.

What do you see as Paul, Weiss’ responsibility to the communities it serves?

We feel a keen sense of duty to all of the communities we serve. An example of this was our unprecedented effort to support individuals and small businesses in New York after

the pandemic hit. We created and populated a website for those needing urgent help with information on some 1,600 government and charitable assistance programs and instructions on how to access relief. Some 400 lawyers ultimately contributed to that effort and/or provided direct services to those in need.

You see this commitment at every level across our firm. My partner Jeh Johnson, the former Secretary for Homeland Security, and a team of Paul, Weiss lawyers, produced a bracing report on racism and racial inequities in the New York state court system that will help bring about real change for those working in the courts and those passing through. And my partner Jennifer Wu, also alongside a Paul, Weiss team, researched and wrote an impactful, much-covered report with the Asian American Bar Association of New York detailing the rise in anti-Asian hate incidents across the city; Jennifer and others are now representing individual victims of that violence.

Will you provide an overview of Paul, Weiss’ pro bono practice and the key issues the practice addresses?

We have always devoted significant firm resources to high-impact pro bono cases, many of which have shaped our society for the better, from the racial desegregation of schools in *Brown v. Board of Education*, to marriage equality in *U.S. v. Windsor*, to our work across several key issues today. Representing the last abortion clinic in Mississippi, we are leading, alongside the Center for Reproductive Rights, the Supreme Court appeal in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, the most significant reproductive rights case since *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* and *Roe v. Wade*.

We are courageously leading several landmark lawsuits seeking to hold hate groups financially accountable for racist violence. Last

November, our lawyers won a \$26 million verdict against the organizers of the 2017 Charlottesville “Unite the Right” rally. We are representing the D.C. Attorney General in a similar civil suit against the groups that organized and led the attack on the Capitol on January 6, 2021, on behalf of those injured by the attack, including many police officers.

Alongside the Brennan Center and others, we are leading efforts to challenge state restrictions on voting and, last April, we coalesced over 100 law firms and major corporations to publicly oppose such restrictions.

In February, we were thrilled to welcome Steve Banks to the firm as our new Pro Bono Special Counsel. Steve spent over three decades at New York City’s Legal Aid Society and most recently served as commissioner of New York City’s Department of Social Services. He is a national leader in the area of housing rights and homelessness, and I am excited to see Steve make our extraordinary pro bono program even more impactful.

What do you tell young people about the type of career the legal profession offers?

Lawyering opens up a world of opportunities to follow your passions and build a fulfilling, meaningful career. At its core, it is about helping others. There is something in the law for everybody, whether it’s helping businesses grow and evolve, protecting their most valuable innovations, defending clients at trial, serving in important public or academic roles, or fighting to safeguard fundamental liberties and freedoms. A legal career rewards creativity and innovation because we are solving our clients’ most pressing and complex problems. There has never been a better time to make an impact and effect real change through the law. ●

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