

LAW WEEK

COLORADO

Up and Coming Lawyers

TAFARI LUMUMBA

FIRM: Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher

PRACTICE: White Collar Criminal Defense
and Corporate Compliance

YEARS PRACTICING: 5

TRIVIA:

Lumumba sharpened his investigatory skills at Yale Law School where he was part of a clinic looking into police abuses against people of color by the East Haven Police Department.

“*I try to just meet folks where they are. I don't try to impose an American style of being a lawyer in Brazil or in Mexico or wherever I may be.***”**



BY HANNAH GARCIA
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Whether it's investigating corporate corruption in Brazil or coaching a high school mock trial team, Tafari Lumumba believes in full immersion.

It's a common thread for the young lawyer, who says about three quarters of his current practice is spent investigating and corporate compliance consulting in Brazil.

“A lot of this is translation, and not just in terms of what one witness says (in one language or another),” Lumumba said. “Wherever we may be in Brazil, we're translating culture, we're translating history, we're translating the legal context as well.”

Lumumba speaks fluent Portuguese and Spanish, which he learned during

trips abroad and by throwing himself into local cultures. In the last year or so, those language skills have merged nicely with his practice. Largely at the center of his professional universe for the past year is the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and other laws meant to curb corruption, which means advising clients can include a large span of responsibilities from on-site investigations to counseling on compliance and prevention. His handle of Brazilian Portuguese also came in handy in past antitrust and whistleblower investigations.

The South American nation is going through what Lumumba called “an extraordinary time” with political and economic crises abound amid global scrutiny. After Brazil passed its first and straightforwardly named “Anti-Corruption Law,” the country's Ministerio da Justiça — which Lumumba analogizes to the U.S.

Department of Justice — has opened three large investigations and incarcerated hundreds.

Through a web of heavy regulation and political turmoil, Lumumba finds those investigative and translating skills useful in navigating the tension from Brazil's own rules with the FCPA in matters ranging from misconduct allegations to vetting Brazilian partners for U.S. companies.

So if he is interfacing with general counsel in the U.S. concerned about how police in Brazil might execute a search warrant or a Brazilian subsidiary who is unfamiliar with American bureaucracy, Lumumba will usually use parallels to explain those functions. It's all about “operating from what the client knows” and blending into a culture to be more effective within it, he said.

“I try to just meet folks where they are,” Lumumba said. “I don't try to impose an American style of being a lawyer in Brazil or in Mexico or wherever I may be.”

Lumumba cut his teeth on investigation work at Yale Law School while working a clinical program that was looking into the East Haven Police Department in Connecticut amid claims of racial profiling and excessive force against Latinos. Lumumba used both his Spanish knowledge to find and compile stories for a legal complaint filed with the U.S. Department of Justice, later working with federal investigators to spawn civil and criminal probes.

He finds parallels in that work to his current practice, from compiling information to analysis of controls within entities to curb and prevent wrongdoing.

“Looking back, I'm doing now what I was doing then,” he said.

When he talks about his trajectory as an attorney, Lumumba said he intends to continue gaining momentum as an authority on anti-corruption compliance and prevention relating to Brazil — and right now he manages a baker's dozen of investigative team members — but his name has dotted publications on trade secrets litigation and pharmaceutical compliance as well. He also trains and recruits junior attorneys at his firm, Gibson Dunn & Crutcher.

Outside the office, Lumumba still loves the law. The Denver native co-founded a mock trial team at the low-income Arrupe Jesuit High School in 2013 although they waited to go to competition until the following year, when the team just missed going on to the next level of competition but took home a load of individual awards.

It's a satisfying way to spend his free time, Lumumba said. The students at Arrupe all work part time to help pay for their tuition and are already “extremely mature,” he said.

He said he tries to use the program as a way to help students figure out more than legal contexts and how to craft a good argument. And in the end, communicating across borders is something he knows how to do well.

“It's not just about mock trial,” he said. “Tell us where you want to go.” •

—Hannah Garcia, HGarcia@circuitmedia.com