

## **MVP: Gibson Dunn's Michele Maryott**

By **Elliot Weld**

*Law360 (November 7, 2024, 11:28 AM EST)* -- Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP's Michele Maryott led a trial team that defended ride-sharing giant Uber Technologies Inc. in a case brought by the Massachusetts attorney general, achieving a favorable settlement against employee misclassification claims and earning herself a spot among the 2024 Law360 Trials MVPs.

### **Her biggest accomplishment:**

Maryott cited the Uber case as her biggest accomplishment of the past year. She served as lead trial counsel for Uber — fighting Massachusetts Attorney General Andrea Campbell's allegations that Uber and Lyft Inc. improperly classified their drivers as independent contractors. In the end, just as the parties were set to deliver closing arguments in the bench trial, the two companies cut a \$175 million deal to settle the case.

The companies also agreed to implement several changes emblematic of those achieved under California Proposition 22 in 2020. These included a \$32.50-per-hour minimum wage for drivers and a portable health insurance fund for drivers who average at least 15 hours per week combined between the two companies.

"I had a wonderful team and a great client," Maryott said. "We had an opportunity to bring in drivers to share their stories. At the end of the day, it resulted in a favorable settlement. That felt very rewarding because we were fighting for the flexibility that drivers wanted."

Maryott added that one of her proudest moments was seeing three junior associates who were part of the Uber team make their trial debuts. She said it prompted the trial judge to express "that he was really pleased that we had allowed them to do that" after senior associates worked with the trial rookies to "give them guidance and the confidence to stand up in court."

### **Her biggest challenge:**

Maryott said the biggest challenge of the past year has been "frankly, the schedule" and being away from her family for large amounts of time due to job demands. Since June 2023, Maryott said, she



worked four trials and two arbitrations, among other duties.

Maryott's goal in every case, she said, is to "give 100%" since that is what clients deserve. She added that meeting such a high standard can be "a little challenging, but it's doable" — even with a packed schedule — because of the "incredible teams that I've worked with."

"Recognition like this does not belong to any one person," she said. "I believe it's a testament to the people who show up every day to do their very best. I've been very blessed to work with amazing colleagues. It's a challenge to do a number of trials in a single year, but there's a lot of positives, as well."

Juggling multiple trial cases can require that "you purge your brain" after each trial "to make space for the facts of the next case," Maryott said. She added that she relies on her support staff to get her up to speed when there's a quick turnaround and that "muscle memory" helps her regain familiarity with details of a case if she hasn't looked at in a while.

#### **What drew her to trial practice:**

Two of Maryott's professors at Pepperdine University School of Law encouraged her to try out for a school trial team, she recalled. Trial work was not something Maryott had ever seen herself doing before that, she said, noting she entered law school wanting to become an entertainment attorney.

But work on the trial team drew Maryott in. After law school, she said, she was able to experience real trial practice as a junior attorney with Gibson Dunn, and that cemented her love for it.

"I love digging into the facts and understanding why," Maryott said. "And then identifying themes that resonate with people. I think so much of what we do is find a common human experience that fact finders, jurors, judges can all relate to, and then bring that out by telling the story."

#### **What motivates her:**

Maryott said her greatest motivation is working with clients who trust her to "handle their most challenging matters" and achieving a favorable outcome for them.

She said she also enjoys setting an example for the next generation of attorneys and "encouraging them to find what they love" about trial work.

"Not everybody loves it, but a lot of them do," Maryott said.

#### **Her advice for junior attorneys:**

Maryott said she advises junior attorneys to always be what she calls a "go-giver" — meaning to volunteer for as many opportunities as possible.

Doing so can lead to unexpected revelations, she said, recalling an example from her second year out of law school, when she was an associate at Gibson Dunn.

In 1998, Maryott said, a Gibson Dunn partner asked her whether she'd be interested in coming to a trial without being officially added to the trial team, since he couldn't justify charging the client — LA-area amusement park Knott's Berry Farm — for another lawyer.

Maryott seized the opportunity, and another arose during the trial when a partner asked whether she wanted to cross-examine the plaintiff's wife. Maryott recalled asking to think a moment, then sitting down and outlining how her cross might go.

"About five minutes later, I said, 'I'd like to do it, but can we work on it at lunch?' And she said, 'Of course.'"

*--As told to Elliot Weld. Editing by Amy French.*

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