

# TEXAS LAWYER

## Texas Attorney of the Year Finalist: Trey Cox

By Laura Lorek

September 17, 2025

**T**rey Cox, co-head of Gibson Dunn's Dallas office, never planned to become one of the nation's most successful trial lawyers.

The former college football player initially considered coaching before choosing law school, driven by what he calls his "competitive nature for good and for bad."

Three decades later, Cox, who has been named one of the finalists for Texas Lawyer's 2024 Attorney of the Year, has assembled a \$3 billion winning streak. Cox's streak includes a record-breaking \$667 million verdict against Greenpeace and a \$15 million settlement representing less than 1% of claimed damages in a securities class action.

To succeed, Cox applies athletic principles to high-stakes litigation. He treats every case like a championship game. He spends months preparing to ensure flawless execution.

Cox's path to legal stardom began at the University of Virginia, where he earned his law degree after playing college football at Washington & Lee University in Virginia. His father's legal career influenced his decision, but Cox's competitive drive sealed it.

"I've sort of always been an athlete and a team guy, partially because I'm a very competitive person by nature," Cox said. "I need to find some way to continue to vent my competitive nature."

That competitive edge emerged early. Cox tried his first case just three months into practice at a litigation boutique, eventually helping grow the firm from five lawyers to 40. He made partner within five years,

quickly learning that success required more than legal skills.

"What I learned very quickly is that partnership means we think you're a good lawyer, now put some meat on the table," he said.

Rather than leaving career advancement to chance, Cox studied Texas's top trial lawyers. He researched their credentials and systematically pursued similar achievements, including publishing articles, teaching trial advocacy, and writing books.

"I went and looked up who the best trial lawyers in Texas are and said what they have on their Bios that impresses me," Cox said. "I wrote down a list and then I set about trying to get that list."

To develop business skills foreign to most lawyers, Cox created the Dallas Roundtable, a networking group that grew from four to 50 members. The group taught him systematic approaches to relationship building.

"Lawyers are very different from all of these other types of professions," he said. "By being around all of these other sales-oriented people, I started learning about this process of how you network, how you go about building business."

Cox's colleagues compare him to a championship coach, a reputation he's earned through his team-first approach. Unlike ego-driven trial lawyers who



Trey Cox of Gibson Dunn

Courtesy photo

insist on handling every speaking role, Cox regularly assigns opening statements and closing arguments to partners whose skills better match specific cases.

"The classic criticism of the trial lawyer is unending ego. I want to do everything—me, my, all that kind of stuff, and that is not the right answer," Cox said. "What we are trying to do is provide a winning result for our client."

His coaching philosophy centers on identifying talent, developing skills, and positioning team members to succeed. At Gibson Dunn's Texas offices, Cox has assembled a team boasting more than 100 judicial clerkships among litigation lawyers, a proxy for exceptional talent.

"The best coaches that I've ever seen ... they identified talent, they figured out what their superpower was, what they were good at, then they helped them develop that, gave them confidence, and then put them in the game to succeed," he said.

Cox's career-defining moment came in the Energy Transfer versus Greenpeace case, which required trying a \$5 billion pipeline dispute in minus-40-degree weather in North Dakota. His team lived in a Days Inn for four weeks, converting a hotel room into a war room complete with computers and printers.

The \$667 million verdict represented a complete victory requiring unanimous jury agreement on both liability and punitive damages, a strict standard, Cox said.

Cox simplified the complex case into two themes: the "ground game" involving physical destruction of pipeline property, and the "air game" involving defamation campaigns designed to disrupt financing.

"We drew a line that is entirely American, and it is your right to disagree, but it is un-American to destroy and to deceive with malicious intent," he told the jury.

Cox dismisses the notion of overnight success, describing the Greenpeace victory as "an overnight success 30 years in the making." That trial succeeded because he applied lessons from every mistake and victory over three decades, he said.

"I had spent 2½ years putting this case together, 65 depositions, hundreds of thousands of documents,

and hours put into this, and then to have 12 people come back and say yes, we agree, your hard work paid off. That's what's fun, that's what's rewarding," he said.

Cox has institutionalized his coaching approach through systematic lawyer development programs. Senior associates run "Texas luncheon learns" covering deposition techniques and trial skills. The firm brings in professional trainers, then reviews transcripts and provides feedback in iterative cycles.

"We are filming this process," Cox explained. "That's what we're doing and that's how we grow and that's how we improve."

The training emphasizes translation skills, converting complex legal concepts into accessible language for juries. Cox warns against "the curse of knowledge" that causes lawyers to lose jurors with technical jargon.

"The more complicated a case gets, the more people go back to what they know best, and what they know best is people," he said. "Ultimately, a lot of what goes on in trial work is, 'Do I like this person? Do I trust this person?'"

He identifies the biggest mistake other litigators make as failing to commit to a straightforward narrative. Lawyers who present alternative defenses like "I wasn't there, but if I was, I didn't do it" surrender credibility with juries.

As co-head of both Gibson Dunn's Dallas office and national litigation practice group, Cox manages leadership responsibilities through delegation and family support. His wife, also a lawyer, handles family duties during extended trials while his assistant keeps him scheduled.

The key to juggling multiple roles, Cox says, comes down to team building: "If you want to go fast, go by yourself. If you want to go far, take a group."

Now over 30 years into his career, Cox continues to apply his fundamental principle: "The best way to predict the future is to create it."

For Cox, that means maintaining the same competitive drive that led him from college athletics to courtroom championships, always preparing like the following case could be the most important of his career.