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Top 20 Under 40

Editor's Note

A lot of hand wringing is going on about the current state of the legal industry and the value of a law degree. It is true that a new law degree is not worth what it was a couple of years ago — if your matrix is the number of new graduates with six-figure salaries at marquee law firms. But every January, when the Daily Journal publishes this list of California's emerging legal leaders, we are reminded of how rewarding legal work

is, far beyond money. We receive hundreds of nominations [672 this year] from lawyers across California at big and small firms, corporations, public agencies and nonprofits. The work they are doing is far-reaching and inspiring. Yet most of these men and women do not start out making six-figure annual salaries. Some may never make that much money in a single year. They work long hours because they love what they are doing and because they are committed to

the law. At its core, law is about service — and that doesn't change all that much whether you are helping Lakers star Kobe Bryant with a legal problem or guiding a multinational corporation through a complex acquisition.

So there is much to be positive about in the legal industry. Read on, because we think we've found a little bit of it.

— The Editors

Five Associates to Watch

BY EB RICHARDSON



Will Chuchawat, 30

Sheppard Mullin
Los Angeles

Will Chuchawat has always been in the fast lane, traveling from east to west and back again. He splits his practice between Sheppard Mullin's Los Angeles office and the office he helped open in Shanghai.

Chuchawat said he knew he wanted to work internationally, and when the firm announced it would open its first office in China in early 2007, he offered to relocate. While his 3,000 yearly billable hours would be missed, the firm supported his desire to become an expert in business relations with China. Chuchawat says he considers being an international specialist important

to his future career in corporate law and mergers and acquisitions. A previous trip to China impressed upon him the rapid growth in Asia and the importance of doing business there.

"International deals will be more prevalent than they are now," he said. "We all need to understand that borders are

disappearing when it comes to doing M&A."

Chuchawat appears at ease moving at the speed of light. In a recent project for LendingTree, he compressed a month's worth of work into one week. He graduated from college in two years, and when he was advised against applying to law school at such a young age, he took several jobs instead, some of which he considers the more important aspects of his resume.

"Pushing carts for a retail chain in Chicago in the winter is probably the most impressive thing I've done," he said. "It put things in perspective."

Although he moves fast, Chuchawat is diligent with his clients' work.

"As a young associate, you can't offer the most experience. But what sets me apart is I care about them more than their mothers do."

Chuchawat returned to Los Angeles in 2009 but still works out of Shanghai for extended periods three or four times a year. Somewhere in the thousands of billed hours and flights across the Pacific, Chuchawat finds time to foster a wine collection.

"My clients like wine, so it's a nice way to do business. It's a way to bring an outside interest into work, help you connect to clients, and that's the key to lasting in this field."