

Calif. Employment Atty On Going Solo To Help Queer Clients

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By **Rachel Rippetoe** | Nov 30, 2022, 3:43 PM EST · [Listen to article](#)

Less than five years out of law school, Samson Spiegelman has launched his own solo employment practice in Los Angeles with one goal in mind: creating a safe environment for queer and LGBTQ people to sue their employers.

Samson Spiegelman

Spiegelman started his career as a [Paul Hastings LLP](#) associate on the defense side of employment law. Then he moved to a smaller Southern California plaintiffs firm, [Helmer Friedman LLP](#).

After leaving the firm to go out on his own in August, Spiegelman, who is transgender, has attracted a swath of clients by leaning into an identity that, given the lack of LGBTQ representation across the legal industry, could otherwise have been isolating.

Law360 Pulse recently caught up with Spiegelman to talk about why he went out on his own so early in his legal career and how tapping into one's community can make for a successful practice. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.



What were you doing before you started your own practice?

I went to law school to do impact litigation for queer and trans people. I wanted to do public interest, nonprofit work. But I ended up going to BigLaw for a lot of reasons that are fairly common. First, the impact litigation firms took a lot of BigLaw people, and they didn't hire right out of law school. There were also student loans, obviously. And I also wanted to get training, but I knew I was not going to do that forever.

Then you went to a smaller plaintiffs firm, Helmer Friedman. What made you decide to leave and go out on your own?

I was working for two attorneys that I have nothing but respect for. I think they're brilliant. I loved working for them and learning from them. But I wanted to focus on queer and trans clients. Although they're obviously wonderful guys who were supportive of those clients, I knew I needed a firm that put my clients' identities and safety and comfort first.

People who are queer and trans, so often they come to a lawyer because they've experienced this discrimination, this harassment and this rejection by their employer. And most attorneys just are not coming from that same background and lived experience. Even the best intentioned, most liberal, most progressive attorney who's not a part of that community will make a misstep in language or just exhibit some unfamiliarity, and that can be really distracting and distressing for a client who's already been traumatized. When you're seeking refuge and you're seeking someone who you can trust to be your advocate, it's so easy to destroy that trust in a way that cannot be repaired.

More simply, queer and trans people, I've found, they want an attorney who's a part of their community. And I think that's common in a lot of marginalized communities. You would prefer to have an attorney who is like you.

Are you seeing more queer people come forward with claims as representation improves in the legal industry?

The laws on a national level and on a statewide level have improved for the protection of queer and trans people, so I think more people are coming forward and bringing claims for a variety of reasons. With increased visibility in the media and politics comes increased backlash from conservative or oppressive employers. I also think that the laws improving and becoming more protective means more people have access to justice. These things are now illegal, and it's clear that they're illegal, so there's not as much risk for an attorney taking it on. So a lot of my cases are basically easy. The law explicitly says it's illegal to misgender people — open and shut case. I don't have to make some argument that convinces the judge, "Hey, this is something that's wrong to do to a person."

So you feel like California's labor laws make your job easier?

Yeah, I mean California in general is a really employee-friendly state, and it has laws where the financial structure is such that attorneys can afford to bring these cases. There are high damages. There are explicit protections for workers that are based in statute. It's easy to bring a statute-based claim rather than a common law claim.

Being less than five years out of law school, did it feel overwhelming going out on your own?

Yeah, it's definitely super scary. But because of the current labor market in the legal industry and my personal background, I felt like if I failed miserably I could get another job very easily at another firm. And I could bring my clients with me, so I just felt like there was this safety net.

How do you attract clients and market your firm?

Genuinely, I have been really surprised at how many people have come to me already in the short time I've been practicing on my own. Probably my main source, like all small law firm attorneys, has been word of mouth and referrals. Sharing with my legal network, "Hey, I'm focusing on queer and trans clients. I'm trans. Send your people to me if you're not feeling competent taking on this case."

And then, on the other side, I am pretty involved in non-legal, queer organizing and that community in Los Angeles, and my friends are too. I think it's sort of common knowledge that, if you're a real estate attorney, you join a realtor group. You go where the clients are and you say, "I'm a lawyer." Then you're the only lawyer they know.

At 29, you're among the crop of young millennial lawyers. What is this new generation doing differently when it comes to running a law firm?

Legal tech has improved so much. I think being a younger attorney who's more familiar with not just specific technologies but how to find and implement new technologies and assess what would be helpful almost certainly helps. I've been surprised and delighted about the tech options that are out there for coordinating client intakes, automating scheduling, organizing files in the cloud, new legal research platforms, things like that. So I can be lean and offer online options for my clients.

I grew up using computers so it's not as difficult for me to adjust as it might be for someone who had been living in the world without them who suddenly had to change their life to implement this new technology. I started practicing after all this legal tech had already come on the scene. That's how I think about practicing law. I've never seen WestLaw in a book or on CDs. My professors told us about that as a fable, but I do my research online.

When starting your own firm, are you ever thinking, "Can I scale this or grow this so that more attorneys like me can come and work in this environment?"

If I was to scale up, that would definitely be top of mind, especially for visibly queer and trans people who are maybe gender-nonconforming or are not fitting the more conservative attorney mold. Employment opportunities can still be limited. But, you know, I'm an employment lawyer. I hate bosses. I would hate to be a boss. Profiting off of somebody else's labor where they're not getting a cut out of the entire product of their labor — I'm opposed to it. I'm sure there will come a point when I'll have to eat my words and just hire someone, but I'm going to put it off as long as I can.

I would encourage attorneys from diverse backgrounds to think about entrepreneurship, because it's a good way around these glass ceilings and the exploitation that can be inherent in the job. It can be really empowering to define your own values and work from your own

values. I'm explicit about the price on my website. I'm explicit about my values and my work. And it's a really great feeling, whether I make a zillion dollars or I just squeak by. It's more important to me to be able to live authentically and do that through my work.

--Editing by Ellen Johnson.

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