



Practice Areas

- Emerging Business & Venture Capital
- Italy Practice
- Labor & Employment
- Nonprofit & Tax-Exempt Organizations

Industry Sectors

- Retail

Education

- Cornell Law School, J.D., 1990
- Marquette University, B.A., 1987

Bar Admissions

- California
- Illinois

Affiliations

Guest lecturer, Employment Law, UC Berkeley Haas School of Business

Former board member, Northern California Human Resources Association (NCHRA)

Current member and frequent lecturer for the NCHRA, California Society for Human Resources Management, and Southern California Professionals in Human Resources Association

Member editorial board of "Bender's California Labor & Employment Bulletin"

Contributing author for Aspatore's "Thought Leadership" series on Employment Law

Former employment law columnist for the Northern California Association of Trial Lawyers

Former board member and longtime pro bono employment counsel to the Richmond Area Multi-Services – the largest mental health services provider in San Francisco for poor and indigent people.

Awards & Honors

- Chambers USA, 2021-2024
- The Best Lawyers in America, 2013-2025
- Northern California Super Lawyers, 2014-2024

Walter M. Stella

Member

San Francisco

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Walter is a senior employment law attorney with more than 30 years of experience advising employers on challenging workplace issues and providing practical solutions that minimize legal exposure in a heavily regulated business environment.

Walter represents some of Silicon Valley's most dynamic corporate players, from Big Tech giants and high-profile tech-adjacent foundations to emerging businesses and ambitious startups.

He frequently operates as outside general counsel on employment law, meaning that major clients rely on him as their first point of contact when employment issues arise. Walter is widely respected for his ability to assess problems, design smart legal strategies, and oversee cost-effective resolutions. In his own day-to-day practice, Walter handles employment law litigation, settlement negotiations, and arbitrations; negotiates executive contracts and advises directors and officers on personal liability and indemnification matters; and provides proactive state and federal regulatory counselling.

For the first two decades of his career, Walter worked as an employment lawyer in two California-based Am Law 100 firms. In 2011, he joined the leadership team of the Miller Law Group, a boutique employment law firm, and helped grow that firm into one of the most prominent employer-side boutiques in the country. He then moved to Cozen O'Connor with the entire Miller Law Group in 2019.

Outside of his private practice, Walter is deeply involved in the Bay Area legal community and pro bono service. He routinely advises the Equal Justice Society and National Center for Youth Law on employment law issues, and he serves as the lead organizer of bi-annual one-day pro bono employment law clinic run through a partnership between the San Francisco Bar Association's Justice Diversity Center and the Association of Corporate Counsel's Bay Area Chapter.

Walter earned his bachelor's degree from Marquette University and his law degree from Cornell Law School.

Experience

Represented Endeavor Fire Protection Holdings LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Building Industrial Partners, in its purchase of all issued and outstanding stock of Kimble & Company, which provides fire sprinkler engineering and installation services. This transaction drew on the experience of the firm's corporate, tax, labor and employment, and real estate attorneys.

Served as counsel to a large health care company in connection with sexual harassment claims brought by an employee against her supervisor. The claims presented a unique situation in which an employee sued another employee over workplace conduct, but did not sue her employer. This placed the client in the difficult position of navigating the legal obligations to both the employee and the supervisor. We successfully guided the client through an investigation and assisted the client in avoiding the pitfalls that could have led to being sued by either the employee or the supervisor. In the

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- Bar Association of San Francisco, Award of Merit, 2008
- The Best Lawyers in the Bay Area, Bay Area Lawyer Magazine, 2005-2006
- Bar Association of San Francisco Pro Bono Award, Bar Association of San Francisco Volunteer Legal Services Program, 2005-2006, 2008
- Outstanding Volunteer in Public Services Award, Bar Association of San Francisco Volunteer Legal Services Program, 2003, 2012-2014, 2017
- Outstanding Volunteers Crystal Award, Justice & Diversity Center of the Bar Association of San Francisco

end, the client avoided being named in the suit, helped reach a resolution between the employees while retaining them both. The complaining employee eventually resigned, but the departure was amicable and no claims against the company were ever alleged.

Represented a staffing company in a class action alleging a myriad of wage and hour claims. We successfully moved to compel arbitration of the employee's individual claims and stay the class action. The plaintiff then filed a claim under the California Private Attorney General Act, which cannot be compelled into arbitration. By having the class claims stayed and limiting the PAGA exposure, we were able to negotiate a favorable settlement.

Represented a financial service company and their managing director in a lawsuit brought by the managing director's former employer. We succeeded in defeating the application for a temporary restraining order. With initial demands in excess of \$5 million, the matter was eventually resolved without the client paying any money, and with no injunctive relief ordered against the client. All parties agreed to mutual release of claims and the client's managing director has no restrictions imposed upon him as a result of the litigation.

Represented a gift card company that was sued by a former executive for age discrimination and retaliation. The matter was fully litigated, and arbitration was commenced. After two days of arbitration, the plaintiff significantly lowered his demands, and the matter was resolved favorably for the client.

Represented a social media company against allegations of pregnancy discrimination and retaliation by a former employee. Despite two formal mediations, the parties were unable to settle the case and remained far apart. Facing arbitration, we were asked to take over the representation and prepare for trial. However, before the client had to spend a significant amount in fees to prepare for the arbitration, we were able to negotiate a settlement within the settlement authority the client had at the two mediations.

Represented a social media company against disability discrimination and retaliation claims by a former employee. The former employee alleges that upon disclosure of his PTSD caused by domestic violence abuse, he was terminated. We successfully had the case moved to arbitration.

Represented Renaissance Food Group, LLC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Calavo Growers, Inc., an international consumer goods and farm products company, in its acquisition of 100 percent of the equity of SFFI Company, Inc. (d/b/a Simply Fresh Fruit), a processor and supplier of fresh cut fruit. This transaction drew on the experience of the firm's corporate, tax, labor and employment, employee benefits and executive compensation, intellectual property, and real estate attorneys.

Represented Orthofin, LLC, a company affiliated with Lincotek Group SpA (an Italy-based global leader in contract manufacturing services for the aerospace and medical businesses), in its acquisition of a majority stake in Riepen LLC and other assets constituting the Danco Medical business. This transaction drew on the experience of the firm's corporate, international, labor and employment, employee benefits and executive compensation, intellectual property, and environmental attorneys.

Represented Hydrofarm Holdings Group, Inc. (NASDAQ: HYFM), a leading hydroponic equipment and supplies manufacturer, in its \$78 million acquisition of all of the membership interests of Field 16, LLC, a manufacturer and distributor of plant nutrients under the Heavy 16 brand, as well as in its acquisition of House & Garden, Inc., Humboldt Wholesale, Inc., Allied Imports & Logistics, Inc., and South Coast Horticultural Supply, Inc. (collectively House & Garden), for \$125 million. House & Garden manufactures and distributes plant nutrients under the House & Garden and Mad Farmer brands. These transactions drew on the experience of the firm's corporate, tax, employee benefits and executive compensation, labor and employment, environmental, commercial litigation, intellectual property, and data security attorneys.

Represented Applied StemCell, Inc., a contract research organization (CRO)/contract development and manufacturing organization (CDMO) specializing in cell and gene therapy, in its merger with NovaQuest, a private equity fund managed by QHP Capital, L.P. This transaction drew on the experience of the firm's corporate, tax, intellectual property, employee benefits and executive compensation, and labor and employment attorneys.

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