

The Elite Few'

A Select Number Of Attorneys Dominate Lucrative Trial Wins

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How do they do it?

Even though most attorneys have one or more stories about their most memorable “win” in court, the cases that pull down the biggest numbers from year to year seem to feature faces that are rather familiar to the trial bar.

And the numbers bear it out.

For the top three categories (med-mal, auto and tort), there were more than 120 awards exceeding \$1 million reported to Lawyers Weekly over the last three years. Almost 50 percent of those awards came from a pool of some 16 lawyers.

In fact, more than 25 reports came from just five lawyers.

Richard P. Campbell of Boston faces some of the best attorneys in the state doing mostly defense work.

“Some lawyers just have a track record of success, and they draw in the best cases,” he says.

“They can reject marginal cases.”

Andrew C. Meyer Jr. of Boston led the way with nine million-dollar verdicts and settlements on which his name appeared. He has also reported another three totaling more than \$13 million in 2001.

“Good cases are made, not born,” maintains Meyer, who concedes that “the reasons for our success are multi-faceted.”

Meyer credits the lawyers and nursing staff at his firm, as well as the “thorough, thoughtful, creative and understanding discovery, and endless preparation.”

Plus, Meyer says, it helps “when insurance companies know you are willing to go to trial and have a track record of success there. Consistent achievement of verdicts assists you in achieving good settlements.”

According to Boston lawyer T. Mark Herlihy, “The reasons for success in each case may be different. In medical malpractice, credibility in the medical field and working with great experts are keys to success. When expert doctors know you do things right and play by the rules, then they are more willing to work with you.”

Patrick T. Jones is among those who have reported multiple million-dollar awards.

“The more complicated the area [of practice], the more experience is a barometer to success,” observes the Boston lawyer. “The [Neil] Sugarmans, [Leo] Boyles and others can work with a client and envision theories and develop strategies that others would not.”

Jones also notes that “sharing of information among plaintiffs’ lawyers is very unselfish. Good lawyers get involved and share with each other.”

But Jones suggests that there is another factor to consider. “What is most important to me are cases where I can make a difference. It makes practice rewarding much more than financially.”

Douglas K. Sheff of Boston agrees.

“You have to have something that keeps you going,” says Sheff. “I feel I have to make a difference in someone’s life. I may be their last chance at [a remedy].”

In the end, however, Jones says that “any reasonably capable lawyer willing to do the work can be a winner.”

The keys to a big award, he says, are largely “a likeable client, good facts that indicate liability and extraordinary damages.”

Considered by many as one of state’s top lawyers, Leo V. Boyle of Boston has earned numerous large settlements and verdicts over the years.

“The older I get, the more I think there is not a strong correlation with verdicts and lawyers,” Boyle remarks. “A big case is like an ocean liner, and the trial lawyer is just a tugboat steering it along. You can have some impact, but you can’t be a speedboat.”

Boyle adds that “success is often about who the client is, what the facts are and who is on the jury. If you have the right ingredients, and you do your homework, you will have your share of wins.”

On the other hand, Boyle laughs, “If you have an unattractive client and poor facts and a skeptical jury, you could be Clarence Darrow and you won’t win the case.”