



Next Gen



This week's Q&A with

Bilal Zaheer

Chicago Business Litigation and Dispute Resolution Partner [Bilal Zaheer](#) is a trial lawyer focused on helping clients resolve complex corporate and commercial disputes primarily involving contract matters, business and securities fraud and breach of fiduciary duty claims. He sometimes likens his practice to being a “corporate divorce lawyer” because he is often brought in when a once-exciting business venture has taken a turn for the worse and his clients need guidance on what happens when they find themselves somewhere they did not expect to be. Bilal counsels (in many senses of the word) clients through the legal and business complexities of all phases of a dispute as well as the human side of litigation.



More About Bilal

Tell us about the most interesting or significant matter you've worked on in your career.

In one of my first cases, I represented a young Tibetan woman seeking refuge in the United States from religious persecution. For the duration, my client was detained at a county jail three hours outside Chicago, so all of our meetings happened there, through a translator, because I did not speak a word of Tibetan, and she did not speak any English. I will never forget the harrowing stories my client shared about her life in Tibet and how she risked her life journeying on foot from Tibet to Nepal to escape persecution. I did my first direct examination and closing argument on this case, and we ultimately secured asylum for our client, changing her life for the better.

About a year after the case concluded, I received a surprise call from my client, who wanted to thank me for representing her pro bono. She then spoke perfect English and shared about the new life she was building in New York. It was the first time we communicated directly and a conversation I will always cherish. That call and the case itself provided such powerful lessons for me, early in my career, on the importance of providing access to justice and the life-changing difference lawyers can make through pro bono representation.

How did you know that you wanted to practice law? // What inspired you to become a lawyer?

I have always been drawn to the principles of justice and truth, enjoyed classes that involved reading, writing and speaking and always loved making a good argument (much to my mother's chagrin). By the time I was in seventh grade, I decided I was going to be a lawyer, though I didn't actually know any lawyers. I'm not sure how I knew law was the right career path so early on, but I can say without hesitation that it was the perfect choice.

Who has had the biggest professional influence in your life? // Did you have a mentor? If so, tell us the most important things you learned from them.

I have been truly fortunate to have an outstanding roster of mentors, both within and outside the Firm, who have cared about me, invested in me and helped me develop as a lawyer and a human being (something I try to pay forward wherever I can). The person who has had the biggest influence in my development is my father, who immigrated to this country with nothing and worked tirelessly to build a successful medical practice, while also caring for our family and giving back to the community. I learned from my father the value of hard work, orienting to excellence, living life with principles and integrity and commitment to service, all of which I try to embody in my personal and professional life.

What do you do to relax and reset after a long week?

Spending time with my wife, whether that is movie night, grabbing dinner at one of the many excellent restaurants Chicago has to offer or getting together with friends and family. Apart from that, music has always been my favorite escape. I play drums in a rock cover band, so when the week is over, I look forward to throwing on a track list and rockin' out on my drum set.

Tell us your favorite book, TV show, movie or podcast and why you like it.

The first season of *Serial* got me into podcasts, and I've become a big fan of the medium ever since. My favorite podcast is *The Daily* by *The New York Times*, which my wife and I listen to on our morning commute. Each episode is so well done — from the captivating storytelling, amazing music and production to the larger societal issues raised. It's a great way to keep up with relevant stories of our time, and I really value the engaging and thought-provoking conversations we have after listening.

What would be your fantasy career if you weren't a lawyer?

A music producer, definitely. Setting aside whether anyone would actually listen to my music, I have always loved the creative process of songwriting, recording and production. One of my hobbies in high school was recording and mixing song tracks, in which I played all the instruments. I still hope to one day have a full recording studio in my home, but until then, I am keeping my day job.



Practical Wisdom, Trusted Advice.

www.lockelord.com

Atlanta | Austin | Boston | Brussels | Chicago | Cincinnati | Dallas | Hartford | Hong Kong | Houston | London | Los Angeles
Miami | New Orleans | New York | Princeton | Providence | San Francisco | Stamford | Washington DC | West Palm Beach