

Rising Star: Akin Gump's Jeffrey King

By Elaine Meyer

Law360, New York (March 29, 2010) -- A current member of the legal team for Galleon Group founder Raj Rajaratnam, with past achievements helping executives at the Coca-Cola Co. and Royal Dutch Shell PLC avoid law enforcement action, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP's Jeffrey King has landed on Law360's list of 10 securities lawyers under 40 to watch.

King, 36, practices securities and white collar defense as a partner at the firm's Washington, D.C., office. In addition to a roster of high-profile corporate executives, he has counseled a number of officials and staff in the White House, Congress and Cabinet positions.

"He's a tremendous young talent," said Robert Hotz, a partner in Akin Gump's securities practice who has worked frequently with King, including on the Rajaratnam team. "The depth and breadth of cases he has been involved in — what I would call front page of the newspaper stuff — has been really staggering."

After graduating from the University of Michigan School of Law, King went straight to Akin Gump in 1998 and rose quickly. He gained a mentor in John Dowd — the well-known securities attorney who authored the report that led Major League Baseball to ban Pete Rose — and has been an integral member of Dowd's white collar defense team for nearly 13 years.

With Dowd, King represented U.S. Department of Justice appointee Monica Goodling, helping her to secure immunity during the investigation of the U.S. attorneys firings.

King credits his rise to Dowd, as well as to a dedication to mastering facts and approaching securities enforcement cases by anticipating parallel criminal proceedings by the DOJ.

Mastering the facts means getting to his client's true story, rather than accepting an allegation on its face, King said.

"You have to dig deep. You have to be willing to spend the time, to spend weeks and months digging through records, asking the right questions, talking to witnesses until you're satisfied that you have left no stone unturned," he said.

"You have to see past sort of the dark clouds of a bad-sounding allegation," King added.

He credited this approach for helping his clients escape adverse proceedings.

King's work with former Coca-Cola chairman Douglas Daft in testimony before the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission helped the executive avoid legal action related to allegations that the company was channel-stuffing.

King scored the same result for the chairman of Shell's exploration and production business in the face of three parallel investigations by the SEC, the Southern District of New York, and the U.K. Financial Services Authority.

In both cases, the defense was bolstered every time the facts were rebuilt and re-examined, King said.

According to Hotz, King's mastery in the Shell case was particularly impressive because the facts involved complicated multinational issues based on accounting for petroleum reserves.

His awareness of the very likely potential of criminal action makes King a trusted attorney for corporate officers who are the subject of securities investigations or lawsuits, and he has even developed a specialty of advising clients who have asserted their Fifth Amendment privilege.

"It's almost inevitable today that most securities cases will have some criminal investigation or some criminal case element to it," King said.

Though it may seem daunting to emulate King's career trajectory, he is modest about his success and advises young attorneys to develop an expertise, take advantage of mentors and opportunities, and always remember that they are a part of a team.

"In a law firm setting, you have to do more than just work hard and bill hours. You have to contribute to the overall success of the team. You have to learn from the other great lawyers on your team. And you have to set an example for more junior lawyers on your team," King said.

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