

## Cohen Ziffer Chair On Maintaining An Edge In A Fierce Market

By **Aebra Coe**

*Law360 (December 22, 2021, 10:15 AM EST)* -- Since its launch in January, New York insurance recovery boutique Cohen Ziffer Frenchman & McKenna has grown from 12 attorneys to 26, and it recently announced it was handing big bonuses out to its associates.

Chair Robin Cohen says the law firm is likely to hit 30 attorneys by February as it sees a big influx of insurance recovery litigation work. The bonuses, which the law firm announced earlier this month, will match, and in many cases exceed, the bonus scale set by Cravath Swaine & Moore LLP in November.

Here, Cohen discusses how her law firm plans to maintain an edge in the current market for talent and her goals for the future.



Robin Cohen

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**The firm recently announced that it was matching, and in some cases exceeding, the Cravath year-end bonus scale. Why is it important, as a new law firm, to do that?**

I think for a number of reasons. Since the launch, we have been incredibly busy and our associates are working really hard. One of the things I'm trying to create is a place where everyone's invested. I think by rewarding the associates, not only matching what Cravath did but in many instances exceeding it, sends a very strong message to everyone that we're very appreciative of the hard work.

The other thing I think it does is it makes it clear to potential new associates that we are paying at the top rate, and therefore you're likely to get the top associates from across the country looking at our firm.

And then the third thing is we are a boutique, but we want to be perceived by the marketplace as doing bet-your-company cases the way BigLaw does. And I think by matching Cravath's bonuses and exceeding them, you send that strong message to not only prospective clients but to the marketplace as well.

**The law firm so far has been growing quickly, from 12 in January to 26. Is that right?**

Yes, it's 26 lawyers. We have been actively looking for new associates. Plus we've gotten a lot of overtures from folks in my space coming over. Moreover, we've also been approached by attorneys who

have significant books of business that are unhappy in their law firm. We've been attracting a lot of women originators in particular. I think they like the fact that we are chaired by a woman, and we are very focused on diversity and inclusion.

Our challenge is going to be, one, whether we stay an insurance recovery firm or we broaden it out to different types of litigation. Even if we stay focused more on insurance recovery work, which is substantial right now and growing, we'll probably be 35 lawyers by February. We need the people to help with the work.

### **Those people joining your firm, what do you think they see there that they didn't at their previous firms?**

There's a tremendous amount of energy at our firm. I am, by far, the oldest person. So it's a very young, energetic firm where most of the lawyers are real trial lawyers. One of the things that's attracting these young associates is that they know they're going to get real, hands-on experience, they're going to get trial experience. And they'll take an active role in the trial. We have our associates arguing significant summary judgment motions, taking witnesses at trial. I think that's the first thing.

The second is we're really trying to create an environment — and I think we have done so — where we are trying to make everyone feel included within the firm and invested within the firm. So, when we do well, everyone does well. Not just the associates but the staff does well.

The third thing is I do think the fact that the chair is a woman, the head of our hiring is a woman, I do think that a lot of the women and the minority attorneys at our firm feel materially different at our firm than they do at others. It's purely a meritocracy at our firm and I think they feel it.

### **Did you as founders face challenges, advantages or both founding a law firm during the pandemic?**

We faced both. And one of the big advantages is our cost margin went down significantly, because one of the biggest costs for most law firms is their space, and we were able to get space relatively cheaply, which really helped the bottom line.

One of the other advantages is that while COVID[-19] has been an awful situation, for the insurance recovery group, our business probably more than doubled as a result of COVID because every small and large business had a COVID issue. They were trying to figure out whether there was coverage for their business losses as a result of COVID. So we have more than 20 cases across the country that we're litigating right now for some of the largest companies and some small companies. So, from a business perspective, our revenue grew, and our costs went down significantly.

The biggest challenge, and we work at this on a weekly basis, is integrating everybody in the firm and making sure there is that glue that makes people feel invested with one another. When you do things remotely, that can be challenging. I do think being in the same office as one another is very important. In our office, everybody is vaccinated. What we're finding in the last six months is a lot of the attorneys and staff are coming into the office, so the integration process has been easier. But it definitely was challenging in the beginning.

### **Do you think there are advantages you have as a boutique, when compared to larger law firms?**

I do. We are a boutique that specializes in insurance recovery work. And so we only represent

policyholders, corporate America, against insurance companies. There are very few firms that do that, and the larger firms that do it, I don't think they do on the level we do. As a boutique, it's easier to give your clients more special attention. And they tend to feel more valued, more heard, and we tend to be more responsive. There's also no red tape. So we're able to make decisions on conflicts, on issues relating to a case, much more quickly than a very large firm.

--Editing by Alyssa Miller.

---

All Content © 2003-2021, Portfolio Media, Inc.