

Member Spotlight: Rebecca Torrey

# Splish, splash...there's a new rainmaker in town.



Rebecca Torrey is a partner at Elkins Kalt Weintraub Reuben Gartside LLP in Los Angeles and head of the firm's employment practice.

She is experienced in all aspects of employment law, with an emphasis on defending employers in 'bet the company' class action and multi-plaintiff state and federal court trials and arbitrations. Rebecca is committed to developing an employer's understanding of the law to reduce the sting of litigation.

Her clients include healthcare companies, professional services firms, entertainment, digital media and technology innovators, manufacturers and recyclers and tax-exempt organisations operating both internationally or domestically.

Rebecca is a frequent speaker and writer on key developments and cutting edge legal issues, including the current proliferation of employment regulation at state and local levels and the challenge to compliance and litigation risk.

Starting an employment practice from scratch might not sound like a lot of fun, but it's a challenge Rebecca Torrey is relishing.

As the newest partner at full-service law firm Elkins, Kalt, Weintraub, Reuben and Gartside LLP in Los Angeles, Rebecca has had just three months so far to develop their employment law offering, but already states the goal of turning it into the youngest Chambers-ranked practice in the USA.

The move had been bubbling under for a few years, ever since she was contacted by a group of old friends who wanted her to join their new firm. As a partner at large law firm Manatt, she didn't feel ready, but this year she has decided to make the move, saying her new partnership has the right combination of factors to become highly successful.

"The firm is financially well run with a progressive culture. We have taken everything we've learned about law firm culture over the years and created a great place to work. The firm is nimble and staffed with large firm veterans attracted by the entrepreneurial challenge."

Everybody loves to come to work, which I can't say is true of all US law firms. I'm a connoisseur of workplace culture by expertise, and I, more than anybody else, appreciate it.

"I left a thriving employment practice of more than 20 lawyers at Manatt, and I now work with women and men who are bright, accomplished and open-minded about new ways of running a law practice. Everybody loves to come to work, which I can't say is true of all US law firms. I'm a connoisseur of workplace culture by expertise, and I, more than anybody else, appreciate it."

As a successful lawyer and mother to two teenage children, Rebecca already had a busy life, but she says the opportunity to build a client-oriented advice and litigation practice according to her valued principles was too good to pass up.

She says: "In this practice, the most important thing is responsiveness. As challenges come at

your clients, you need to retain an understanding of the client's immediate concerns in light of their business strategy. What I appreciate about good employment lawyers is their ability to connect easily with people and adeptly manage their concerns and questions."

Employment law is complex in California and the US at large, with different and sometimes conflicting laws at the Federal, State and Municipal levels. As a result, Rebecca's advice business is flourishing as employers struggle to stay on top of all the regulations that affect their businesses. The issues are varied, including discrimination, fair pay, restrictive covenants, wage and hour compliance, leaves of absence and paid sick leave.

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She says: "It became clear the more I practiced that most litigation could be avoided or reduced with the appropriate advice provided at the right time. There are transitional moments in the context of an employment dispute that decide whether it goes towards an active dispute or is resolved. I started developing an advice practice years back after defending employers in protracted and costly litigation, and the two work well together. While I enjoy the challenge of trial, I get a lot of personal satisfaction from giving practical, strategic advice to employers that allows them to avoid liability, but also maximize the contribution of their employees."

Rebecca has two pieces of general advice for employers derived from her experiences so far.

"Firstly, it is really important to address conflict as early as possible, before it festers and becomes a major problem. It's human nature to avoid conflict, but it must be dealt with. Secondly, the golden rule encourages us to treat people with respect. Most employees respond better if they are treated with respect, even if there is criticism involved. And that includes treating employees with respect when it's time for them to move on."

Besides employment law, Rebecca also has a passion for entrepreneurialism and enjoys helping start-up business owners to navigate legal hurdles in pursuit of their business goals. Her passion extends to a business venture of her own, which she runs as a side project with two other female lawyers. She is a founding owner and Chief Legal Officer of a technology start-up, Citadella Media, LLC, which has just released a dating game app worldwide called Splish in the Apple Store. 'Splish is built on the same principles we use in networking,' she says, 'reaching out to connect with new people through conversation that may develop into meaningful relationships.'

Rebecca's ability to pack new challenges into an already hectic schedule is a legacy of the example set by an early mentor and female role-model Chief Judge Deanell Reece Tacha. She worked for Federal Judge Tacha as a young judicial clerk in Kansas on the Tenth Circuit US Court of Appeals, and they remain close friends.

She says: "Deanell is one of those amazing people that you are lucky to brush up against in life. Besides making everyone feel special, she has an effective approach to working with

people focussed on teamwork and mentoring, which deeply influenced my own management style. At the time Deanell had four children between the ages of five and twelve, but managed her job, community responsibilities and life exceptionally well. I had first-hand experience of watching her balance professional life and family, while enjoying a rewarding relationship with her husband that lasts to this day."

This important lesson of finding time for family was not lost on Rebecca, who has two children aged 14 and 16. Both attend top international school, Le Lycée Français de Los Angeles, and ski race competitively when not studying. The network of international friends they have developed has inspired a love of travel that Rebecca does her best to indulge.

"We have friends from countries all over the world and we travel a lot. I have some influence, but they mostly pick where we go. Recently we visited Cuba and we are planning a trip to Europe this summer, taking in Berlin, Paris and London."

"The kids are a great language and cultural resource since they are fluent in French, while my daughter is also learning German and my son Spanish."

It seems impossible that there might be time for anything else in such a hectic schedule, but when Rebecca does manage to squeeze a little time out for herself, she enjoys writing fiction. She is currently in the middle of a teen novel and also writes short stories. She hasn't been published yet but, as a truly goal-oriented person, believes it is only a matter of time.

Watch this space, we wouldn't bet against her!

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## Elkins Kalt Weintraub Reuben Gartside LLP

IR Global exclusive Employment Law member in US - Los Angeles

[elkinskalt.com](http://elkinskalt.com) | [rtorrey@elkinskalt.com](mailto:rtorrey@elkinskalt.com) | (310) 746 4484

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