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TOP BOUTIQUES IN CALIFORNIA 2025

CELEBRATING CALIFORNIA'S SMALL-BUT-MIGHTY SPECIALIZED LAW FIRMS

LAWFIRM LEADERS: UNDER 25 LAWYERS

Aaron May & Grant Gelberg

HALPERN MAY YBARRA GELBERG LLP

LOS ANGELES & SAN DIEGO

Aaron May and Grant Gelberg

Aaron May and Grant Gelberg of Halpern May Ybarra Gelberg LLP first met as federal prosecutors in the United States Attorney's Office in Los Angeles, where together they tried major fraud cases.

May later moved to private practice, while Gelberg remained with the U.S. Attorney's Office thinking about his next steps. The two were having lunch one day when May asked Gelberg if he'd like to join his firm.

"[May] said we're building something here and now's the time to come in and help build this and bet on yourself," Gelberg recalled. "And it's the best advice I've ever taken."

The pair now help manage a growing law firm focused on multiple areas, including white-collar defense and trade secret litigation, and they still occasionally try cases together.

May, a Stanford Law School graduate, said their shared backgrounds as prosecutors help them to better defend their clients.

"It gives us the perspective to understand how the government thinks about its cases, how it's going to go about its litigation of the matter, and allows us to anticipate that and draft and prepare a defense with that experience in mind," he said. "Also, we have good relationships with people in the government from our time there, and it allows us to talk to them and speak with them with credibility."

Gelberg, who graduated from the University of Michigan Law School, said their background also resonates in their management style, where they encourage colleagues to be deeply involved in their cases, from start to finish.

"We can take a case from the various early stages all the way through to trial and on to appeal," Gelberg said. "So that ownership type of ethos, I think we took from our time in the DOJ and brought it to the firm."

Many of their proudest joint cases aren't public. But Gelberg said one his favorite matters was when the pair represented an elderly couple who was defrauded by their investment advisors. The case resulted in an $8 million verdict in arbitration.

"These were clients where you really jumped out of bed to advocate on behalf of them... elderly people who had had a big chunk of their savings taken," Gelberg said. "To fight for them and get such a good result was really one of the most rewarding cases of my career."

The two say they've built a foundation of trust over the years by collaborating on strategies, whether it's how to distill a complicated financial story for a jury or who's doing cross examinations. They say they always have each other's backs — an example they hope to set for their colleagues.

"When we started the firm, we wanted this to be a place where we would enjoy coming to work with people who would do high-quality work," May said. "And that's our goal ... to maintain that environment where we like everybody. We're not looking to grow for growth's sake."