Bloomberg Law

They've Got Next: The 40 Under 40

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Business & Practice

Michael Montalbano of Blank Rome

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Please describe two of your most substantial, recent wins in practice.

I helped lead Hanford Tank Waste Operations & Closure (H2C) to victory in a $45 billion Department of Energy procurement for tank disposition at the Hanford nuclear site. After DOE rescinded H2C's initial award, a competitor argued that a short lapse in H2C's registration permanently disqualified H2C.

This presented a problem because the case law on this issue was not favorable. So, instead of focusing on what other courts were saying, we focused the court on the text of the applicable regulation, and the draconian outcomes that would result if the court adopted the competitor's interpretation. The court ultimately agreed with us, upholding H2C's award in October 2024.

I also represented our client, Louis Berger Aircraft Services (now Versar), at oral arguments before the Federal Circuit. One of the main issues in that appeal was whether our client was complying with Spanish and Italian labor laws.

This required us to literally translate those laws into English and then present them to the Federal Circuit in a way that was easy to understand. Ultimately, we convinced the Federal Circuit that our client had complied with those laws when it issued a unanimous decision upholding our client's contract in July 2024.

What is the most important lesson you learned as a first-year attorney and how does it inform your practice today?

You will inevitably mess up. What is important is learning from your mistakes so you can provide even better client services next time.

I bring this continuous improvement mindset to every new matter by asking myself:

1. How did we do this last time?
2. What worked and what did not work?
3. How can we do an even better job this time?

How do you define success in your practice?

I define success as solving the client's problem. Clients come to outside counsel when they have a problem that they cannot fix. To me, the whole point of our profession is to fix those problems, and barring a complete fix, find a solution that minimizes known risks to the client.

What are you most proud of as a lawyer?

I successfully convinced a prosecutor to resentence a man who had a history of addiction, but who had started turning his life around. After the resentencing, the man was scheduled to be released from prison around Father's Day. The man's father sent me a screenshot of the release date with a short note: "Best Father's Day gift I could ask for. Thank you."

Who is your greatest mentor in the law and what have they taught you?

My practice group leader, Justin Chiarodo. Justin has taught me the importance of hard work and delivering exceptional client services. Despite being the head of our practice group, he is the first person to jump on an inconveniently timed matter. In short, he leads by example.

Tell us your two favorite songs on your summer music playlist.

"My Hero" – Foo Fighters. "All the Small Things" – blink 182. My wife and I lift weights together every Saturday morning, and these two songs are always on our playlist.

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