

Rising Star: Vinson & Elkins' Stephen Jacobson

By Emily Brill

Law360 (October 10, 2019, 4:09 PM EDT) -- Vinson & Elkins LLP's Stephen Jacobson has helped companies like Blackstone Infrastructure Partners and Talos Energy navigate the executive compensation and benefits issues associated with high-dollar mergers and acquisitions, earning him a spot as one of five benefits attorneys under age 40 honored as a Law360 Rising Star.

BIGGEST DEAL OF HIS CAREER:

When Blackstone wanted to make its first investment, it turned to a team led by Jacobson to ensure the executive compensation issues associated with the transaction were handled smoothly.

In March, Blackstone paid \$3.3 billion to acquire 100% of the ownership interests in Tallgrass Energy LP's general partner and 44% of the economic interests in Tallgrass. Jacobson considers it one of the biggest deals of his career thus far.

Because the transaction gave Tallgrass' management team the option to stay with the company even though they were giving up their ownership interests, Jacobson's team had to structure executive compensation packages that incentivized the Tallgrass executives to stick around.

"A lot of the management team individuals received pretty large payouts as a result of the transaction, so finding a compensation arrangement that would make them want to stick around, and an arrangement that would incentivize them to grow the business in connection with our client Blackstone's objectives, was one of the transaction's big challenges," Jacobson said.

RISING ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ STAR



Stephen Jacobson
Vinson & Elkins

Age: 37

Home base: Houston

Position: Partner

Law school: Tulane University Law School

First job after law school: Associate at Vinson & Elkins LLP

OTHER NOTABLE DEALS:

In 2018, Jacobson worked on nearly 60 transactions. The 15 that were publicly announced were worth more than \$13 billion, according to Vinson & Elkins.

Those transactions included Talos Energy's merger with Stone Energy Corp. in an all-stock deal that created a new oil and gas company called Talos Energy Inc. with an initial enterprise value of about \$2.5 billion.

That transaction involved replacing the management team from Stone with Talos' team and transitioning from a private compensation structure to a public one. Jacobson led the team of Vinson & Elkins attorneys that helped guide the new company through this process.

Jacobson also counseled clients last year — working on a total of 235 matters for 152 clients — and worked on numerous initial public offerings, including that of Liberty Oilfield Services and New Fortress Energy LLC, he said.

PROUDEST MOMENT AS AN ATTORNEY:

Jacobson, who has spent his whole legal career at Vinson & Elkins, said he's very proud when he can successfully mentor younger attorneys at the firm.

He remembers a particular moment when the chairman of a company's compensation committee thought one of his mentees — a third-year associate at the time — was a partner.

"That was incredibly rewarding to see, knowing I'd coached this person and helped her build her skill set," Jacobson said.

Seeing his mentees become clients' "first point[s] of contact" for executive compensation matters and work on transactions with skill and confidence fills him with pride, he said.

WHAT MOTIVATES HIM:

Jacobson said he's motivated to help clients solve the executive compensation and benefits-related problems that arise during transactions.

"What motivates me are the challenges that arise on transactions — working through them and arriving at solutions that are the best for all parties," he said. "I like solving problems, so that's pretty motivating."

Jacobson said he's also motivated by the chance to interact with many different people at the companies he advises — from human resources executives to members of C-suites to boards of directors.

"I like interacting with various personalities, so something that motivates me to go to work everyday is the opportunity to work with all kinds of people," Jacobson said.

— As told to Emily Brill

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2019 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,300 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 years old as of April 30, 2019, in order to be considered for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.