David Bowker Wins National Law Journal's 2024 Attorney of the Year Award

By Steve Lash

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The key to success in the legal profession is no great secret, according to David Bowker, the National Law Journal's 2024 Attorney of the Year.

"Do what you love and give the work everything you have," said Bowker, adding that it also helps to surround yourself with great lawyers.

"The only way it works is to have teammates and colleagues," said Bowker, managing director of Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr's Washington office. "I really believe in teamwork and team effort."

During his award-winning year, Bowker was instrumental in securing the release of American environmentalist Morad Tahbaz, who was imprisoned in Iran for nearly six years on trumped up charges of espionage related to his wildlife conservation work. Bowker also represented Dow Jones and its Wall Street Journal in achieving the release of WSJ reporter Evan Gershkovich, who was imprisoned in Russia on accusations of having spied for the United States.

Courtesy photo

David Bowker, with Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr.

In both cases, Bowker developed a legal strategy as he worked with U.S. officials and other officials to secure the release. In Gershkovich's case, Bowker also petitioned the United Nations, according to WilmerHale.

"It was a busy year in 2023 — and equally busy in 2024," Bowker said. "With practice and help from efficient teams, I am more efficient now."

Bowker complemented his diplomatic success with courtroom victories.

He won a $589 million judgment for United Kingdom investors against Venezuela for defaulting on sovereign debt. Bowker, who co-chairs WilmerHale's International Litigation Practice, also represented U.S. owners against Venezuela's national oil company, PDVSA, for the alleged taking of an oil and gas drilling company in violation of international law, the law firm reported.

In addition, Bowker represented Apple against Israeli spyware company NSO group for allegedly hacking the IPhones of human rights activists, journalists and dissidents. The case was recently dismissed but not before the U.S. Commerce Department prohibited the NSO Group from doing business with American companies.

Bowker also successfully represented the Metropolitan Museum of Art in an ownership dispute regarding a Van Gogh painting.

"It helps to be motivated and really committed to the cases," Bowker said in explaining these successes. "It helps to come from a firm with a general litigation tradition."

Bowker was also one of many attorneys who represented Genentech and other pharmaceutical companies in their successful Supreme Court appeal of a circuit court ruling that had revived a lawsuit alleging the firms had aided and abetted terrorism by doing business with the Iraqi Health Ministry.

The Supreme Court granted the appeal, vacated the circuit court decision and remanded the case to be reviewed in light of the justices' 2023 unanimous ruling in *Twitter v. Taamneh,* which created a high hurdle for those alleging that a company aided and abetted terrorism.

Bowker, an adjunct professor of international law at the University of California at Berkeley School of Law and Georgetown University Law School, was an attorney-adviser on the law of armed conflict at the U.S. State Department.

Bowker credited his government service with helping him "learn how to keep many balls in the air."