

Day Pitney Atty Does Her Heavy Lifting At Tournaments

By Nick Muscavage

Law360 (July 29, 2021, 4:26 PM EDT) -- Day Pitney transactional attorney Ariel M. Risinger's career path has been anything but typical, she said.

She worked for eight years as a litigation paralegal in New York for BigLaw firms such as Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP and Morrison & Foerster LLP before attending law school. She received her degree from Seton Hall University School of Law in 2015 and went straight to in-house counsel, where she worked for AIG and other insurance companies before landing at Day Pitney as an associate in April.

Now, the 40-year-old New Jersey native has turned to something entirely different: competitive powerlifting.

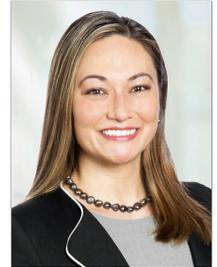
After entering her first contest in March, Risinger secured her first win May 22 when she placed in the top spot for her bracket at the New Jersey State Championships for Powerlifting, deadlifting 363.7 pounds.

Her motto is simple.

"I'm just going to go out there and do my best, regardless if it's as a lawyer, or in powerlifting, or in whatever I do," she told Law360 Pulse. "My career as a lawyer has been very atypical, so I always tell law students and new lawyers that you don't have to follow the same path that everyone expects you to follow in order to get to the place you want to go."

She was introduced to powerlifting in 2018 by her trainer at Base gym in Jersey City, where Risinger — who works in Day Pitney's New Jersey and New York offices — grew up and currently lives. She entered her first contests without any expectation of how she would do.

"I just went out there and performed," she said.



Ariel M. Risinger



Ariel Risinger, an attorney at Day Pitney, lifting weights during a powerlifting competition. (Adam Ferchen Photography)

From that perspective, competitive powerlifting and working as a lawyer have several similarities, she said.

Attorneys prepare as much as they can before a case, but in the end, they never know what a judge's opinion on a motion will be, or what a jury's verdict will be. The same goes for competitive powerlifters; they train extensively before a contest, but never know how they will be judged or ranked against other competitors.

"I think there is a lot of hard work and hours that go into both," Risinger said. "For me, I work with a lot of contracts, and you might have a 15- or 20-page contract, but the amount of work that went into it, all that behind-the-scenes stuff, you don't really see that when you turn it over."

"It's the same thing with powerlifting," she added. "You get up there and you do a lift, and it's like 10 or 15 seconds, but to get to those 15 seconds, there's a lot that goes into it."

As a transactional attorney with a focus on technology and intellectual property, Risinger said she is very meticulous. Every word in a contract matters, she said, just as the positioning of every body part of a powerlifter's form plays a role in the end result.

"I have the same sort of mindset when I approach being a lawyer and also when I approach my training," she said.

In addition to her day job and powerlifting, Risinger serves as the president of the Filipino American Lawyers Association of New York.

Her accomplishments in and outside the office have been commended by Day Pitney's leadership.

"While we are pleased to have a lawyer of Ariel's caliber join our technology practice, she is just as much of an asset to our firm due to her outside interests and accomplishments," Susan R. Huntington, vice chair of Day Pitney's corporate department, told Law360 Pulse. "Ariel is a successful professional — whether drafting contracts or competing in weightlifting events."

Before competing as a powerlifter, Risinger was a springboard diver for two years while attending Smith College and competed in gymnastics for eight years before that.

She still loves both sports, and was tuned into the Olympics when she saw that Simone Biles had withdrawn from competition to focus on her mental health.

"I have a lot of respect for people like her who say, 'Nothing is worth being detrimental to my mental health,'" Risinger said.

She's hoping attorneys can learn something from Biles' message.

"I think that mental health, and physical health, has been ignored for so long in the legal field," she said. "I think they now realize that mental health and physical health are going to be way more important than trying to win."

Risinger has been competing while suffering from psoriatic arthritis. She is trying to use her career and accomplishments to inspire younger attorneys — as well as other women in powerlifting — and is planning to do so at future contests.

Her next contest is Aug. 21 at the U.S. Powerlifting Association Sink or Swim Powerlifting Championship. She is aiming to break state records for her age and weight class at the event.

But even if she doesn't, Risinger said she won't stress.

"I hope that other people can see that you can do all of these things, you can have the physical fitness aspect, and still be a good lawyer and work at a really good firm," she said. "It's about changing that mindset and saying, 'It's OK if you don't reach this goal and don't meet these expectations that this industry, or this sport or other people, have put on you.'"

--Editing by Patrick Reagan.