

# WORTH THE FIGHTING FOR: THE DIGNITY OF WORK.

BY SHELLY CANNON



Zein E. Obagi, Jr.

The dignity of work matters. Basic rights such as being treated well and compensated fairly are accorded to employees in America. But that isn't always the case. As attorneys who specialize in employment law, Zein E. Obagi, Jr. and his team at Obagi Law Group, P.C. know this better than anyone. The Los Angeles-based firm has recovered more than \$10 million for clients in judgments and settlements over the past five years alone.

"There's grave injustice to taking a performing employee's job for an unlawful reason," explains Obagi, "the employee feels it because it impacts self-confidence, and can be embarrassing to explain to friends and family."

The law is complex. Here's what isn't: Obagi's dedication and moral fortitude. Practicing employment law enables him to live his purpose and help people. A native Californian and son of immigrants, Obagi is an attorney, entrepreneur, and socially conscious advocate. Growing up with six sisters (he is one of nine children) and married to a successful doctor, he is a proponent of women's rights and equality for all workers.

"We find that clients have a sense of what is wrong or unlawful," says Obagi. "They can't necessarily identify the violation but they know it's wrong."

That's where the Obagi Law Group team comes in. Experts in not only identifying violations but fighting for the victims of those violations, Obagi's attorneys tackle the most difficult employment law cases on behalf of their clients.

When someone has been severely wronged in the workplace -- whether by harassment, discrimination or retaliation -- Obagi's approach is fueled by conviction. "We will persevere where other attorneys will stop, or take the easy route out."

Which speaks volumes. When you have a case, you want a formidable proponent in your corner. Undaunted and unrelenting, Obagi takes on monumental Goliaths and wins. As Obagi explains it, there's more at stake for clients than money.

"After I started handling employment cases, I saw the impact on people's lives," says Obagi. Case in point: age discrimination. As with other types of discrimination, it's illegal. And yet, age discrimination happens far more often than it should.

"We see that when it's time to cut employees, some employers target their oldest staff who have 5-15 years left in their working career before retirement," Obagi explains. "For an older employee, an unlawful age discrimination is devastating. At a certain age, many employees have a difficult, if not impossible, time finding another job."

In another case, a company fired an employee because he complained about a violation of the law -- a clear case of retaliation. "We did a lot of discovery, reviewing documents, and found the email that reported the complaint and the subsequent boss's email that said, 'Can this guy; he's a troublemaker'," says Obagi. "After our lawsuit, the employer realized the wrongs. The employer offered a major settlement quickly before any of the evidence hit the public record in our federal lawsuit. Our client got his dignity back."

The Obagi team's intelligent litigation strategies help clients navigate the labyrinth of the legal system. As always, Obagi meets the moment calm, collected, and well-prepared. He is that rare human with both the attribute of empathy and the instincts of a warrior. As his firm states, it provides small firm attention and large firm results. The word is out.

The firm set a company record for revenue in 2020, including cases that began pre-pandemic. The biggest reason for that success in the investment Obagi makes in his team -- taking on the role of teammate and peer rather than boss. Beyond any doubt, he wants each member to know how valued they are. "I value every one of my teammates," Obagi says. "It takes a team to work well, and I welcome constructive criticism."

That's leadership in action.

These days, with Covid-19's uncertainty impacting people's lives and livelihoods, the firm's work carries even greater consequence. Employees are anxious about catching the virus at work and bringing it home to family members. There are protections in place -- ideally -- to safeguard employees' health. For example, employers must inform employees if a fellow worker tests positive so they can get tested. Of course, if employees make a safety complaint, they cannot be unlawfully retaliated against in California.

And when a company fails to follow those guidelines, or punishes an employee for voicing their safety concerns, Obagi Law Group is there to fight.

Although Covid-19 has upended the employment landscape, Obagi's firm made a decision to forge ahead, rather than pull back, its efforts. His mission: to "get out there more than ever ... and help employees in need."

Working on behalf of others and his community, ensuring a fairer, more just society, Obagi has been committed to public service for years. While attending the University of Southern California, Gould School of Law, he went to Louisiana to help Hurricane Katrina victims, providing pro bono legal aid.

Other public service and professional endeavors include everything from the Los Angeles 5 (LA5) chapter of Rotary Club International to serving the Los Angeles County Bar Association. There, he serves as Program Chair for the Small Firm Section Executive Committee, and sits on the LACBA President's Advisory Committees for Women in the Legal Profession and for Judicial Appointments.

Helping people is "rewarding from an emotional and psychological standpoint," says Obagi, "to empower the disempowered." Empowerment that makes a profound difference as it restores the dignity of work. He adds, "It's so great to serve my fellow Californians, especially women who have been empowered by #metoo, and others by the national recognition of continuing systemic racism." And all of us are the better for it.

Small firm attention. Large firm results.

**OBAGI LAW GROUP, P.C.**

THE EMPLOYEE'S LITIGATORS

811 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1721 • Los Angeles  
obagilaw.com (424) 284-2401

Attorneys cannot guarantee outcomes. Results are fact-specific to each case.