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SECURING A STRONG FINISH

by Jennifer Hadley

Sevens Legal, APC: Samantha Greene's successful track record in criminal defense in San Diego is rooted in a sincere desire to safeguard her clients and their families, and strengthened by her resolve to help those charged with misdemeanors, felonies and federal crimes to safely navigate through the long road in front of them.

"The most important thing for the lawyers at Sevens Legal is that every single client is happy with the representation that they have received when their individual case is over. In this practice it is often difficult for a client to be 'happy' since most are facing serious criminal charges and potential consequences. However, we want our clients to know that we have done everything possible to obtain the best result. Personally, I want my clients to know I am available for them almost any time of the day or night because I understand that their criminal case is the single most important and all-consuming thing they are dealing with. Nobody wants to wait for answers and consultation. If I were charged with a crime I would want answers and help right away and that is what we strive to provide," says Samantha Greene, Criminal Defense attorney and founder of Sevens Legal, APC.

TAKING THE FIRST STEPS

After nearly 15 years of practice, Greene still remembers why she first decided to choose law as her passion and her profession. Growing up in Los Angeles, Greene's father was a civil litigator, who first introduced her to the inside of a courtroom. "From the first time my father brought me into the courtroom to watch one of his trials, when I was six years old, and introduced me to the judge, sitting way up there on the bench, I have wanted to be an attorney," Greene says.

"But it wasn't until I saw, firsthand, the way the criminal justice system can railroad somebody if they don't have good, hard-working representation, that I knew I wanted to be a criminal defense attorney. From that moment I knew that I wanted to represent people in court and do everything within

the law to make sure they were treated fairly," she adds. As such, after earning her undergraduate degree from UCSB, Greene moved to San Diego in 1997 to attend University of San Diego, School of Law.

Greene is self-deprecating when explaining how she created the opportunity to practice law in San Diego. "I fell into my first job by spending as much time there, volunteering my researching abilities and basically begging for a job. I met my soon to be boss and mentor and convinced him to give me a chance. He hired me for a 3-month probationary period."

Just as Greene had always suspected, the practice of criminal law suited her just perfectly, as it offered her the chance to help people by giving them a voice when they're facing severe and life-altering consequences for criminal offenses. Speaking candidly, she says, "I feel bad for people who are getting the shaft in life. It's not even empathy...I just feel badly for people who made a bad decision, or who have an underlying cause behind the crime. Very few people are criminals because they are just bad people. The majority of the time there is an underlying issue. There may drug or alcohol addiction, or mental health issues. They often need a psychiatric evaluation to find out why they did what they did, and most importantly, to ascertain how can we prevent it from happening again."

Continuing she says, "Being a criminal defense attorney isn't just about what happens in the courtroom. It's about listening and answering questions, and guiding people through the criminal court system. Sometimes it feels like I'm 50% lawyer, and 50% psychologist. I am there to listen, and they like being given a chance to explain. But I am a straight shooter. I try to be





comforting, but my client and often their families need to know the truth. I give them the worst case scenario first. I don't give them false hope, or I'm setting myself up to fail them. If they think I failed them they aren't going to be happy," she says.

Moreover, Greene insists on making sure her clients have her cell phone number so she can be reached at virtually all hours. "It drives defendants crazy to not know what is going on, so we make sure we are accessible. Often times I will get a call from a mother or father, sister or husband of someone who is in jail for the first time and they don't know what to do. I have found that working through the situation with the family as well as the client by explaining the bail process, the court process, what the timing will be, and so on, allows the family to sleep at night and gives them some peace of mind despite the fact that it isn't always information they want to hear." All the same, Greene's years of experience have taught her that as far as clients are concerned, "knowing is so much better than not knowing," she says.

SETTING THE PACE

After six years, and rising through the ranks at the first firm she joined, Greene says the direction the firm took into other practice areas left her feeling that she wasn't helping people as much as she could. She chose then to try her luck on the prosecution side, by joining the San Diego District Attorney's Office.

"I applied for the job and went through an incredibly rigorous application and interview process. I was lucky to get the job and for over two years, I used my experience as a defense attorney, as well as all that I learned at the DA's office, and tried to be fair and even handed while executing my duties as a prosecutor. I had a wonderful experience and the camaraderie amongst the attorneys in the office was such an incredible learning tool," she says.

Yet Greene says that her work as a prosecutor only reinforced that she was meant to be working in criminal defense. "If you've always been a prosecutor, you're only coming from one perspective. You're looking at words on paper, rather than looking at a real person, with a real family. The prosecutors have all of the power, and the defendants are fighting impossible battles. If I had my way every criminal defense attorney would have experience as a prosecutor and prosecutors would have experience in defense.

That way all sides have the benefit of seeing the whole person who is accused, rather than just what's on a piece of paper in front of you." Sheepishly Greene admits, "I liked having the opportunity to be able to explain in many cases, why some charges should only be misdemeanor charges."

After a couple of years, Greene explains that the prosecutor's office was no longer a good fit with her growing family. She took a break from criminal law, and spent time writing appeals and teaching Legal Writing II at a local law school. Before long though, she says she needed to get back to work. More precisely, she needed to get back into defense work. She did so several years ago and since then has grown Sevens Legal, APC into a thriving practice with an incredibly loyal clientele, a largely referral-based practice, a perfect 10.0 Avvo rating, and a significant portion of her business stemming from fellow attorneys.

Greene doesn't deny that she works hard. She admits to losing sleep, worrying over clients, yet still finds her work as a voice for the accused, exhilarating. In a practice area largely comprised of men, she says she thrives in the environment. "There is a bit of adrenaline, obviously because my clients have a lot riding on me, and I have to know that I have done my very best for them. I made a commitment to help them come through the process as unscathed as possible," she says.

Furthermore, she knows that in order to continue running a successful firm, she needs to bring in new business, which is obviously another reason client satisfaction is vital. "Satisfied clients refer you to others, or their families refer you to others. When I get a good result for my client, it can change their life, and that feels great. They are also great referral sources," she says honestly.

The same goes for fellow attorneys. Greene and her team at Sevens Legal are honored to receive referrals from their colleagues in the San Diego legal community, and insists upon paying referral fees, in compliance with State Bar allowances. It also doesn't hurt that Greene is not in competition with other attorneys. "We aren't a threat to fellow attorneys because we only do criminal defense. We don't practice in any other areas, so attorneys can feel comfortable referring their clients without fear that we would try to steal them, or take over other cases," Greene says frankly.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

In order to assure client satisfaction, Greene admits that she will turn down cases, but only if she knows she's not the best attorney for the case. "I don't turn cases down because of charges. People deserve to feel like they are my only client. If I know I don't have the time to give them that, I will turn down the case, but it happens once in a blue moon. I love what I do," she says.

In fact, she's carved a burgeoning niche in representing those who are charged with domestic violence, and/or sexual abuse, which are serious and sensitive charges.

For her part, Greene is humble about her successes in these types of cases. "In sex crime and domestic violence cases, often the most important part of the case involves the calls you make right away. I've done a lot of these types of cases, so I know just how important it is to get busy making calls right away," she says simply.

She is also mindful of being understanding when it comes to the victim and/or the family of the victim. "This can be the hard part of the job. I try to explain to them that I understand that they were hurt, and I want to help make it better. If the victims are happy, or happier than they were, it makes things better for my client."

Furthermore, Greene says that fellow criminal defense attorneys in San Diego are by and large overwhelmingly helpful to one another, which also helps her provide the best possible representation. "People bend over backwards to help each other in criminal defense. There's no acrimony in the field, because we are all on the side of helping people. I can call anyone in the San Diego defense community with a question or for help, and they will absolutely help. We are really lucky to practice in this legal community."

TRACK RECORD OF EXCEPTIONAL RESULTS

Representing everyone from children to adults facing misdemeanor, felony or federal charges, Greene has had her share of unusual circumstances, which she has overcome to her clients' benefit. One such case involved a client facing serious charges. His fear was compounded by the fact that he had gone deaf as the result of a recent and serious infection.

"He was not equipped to deal with the two situations at the same time. In order to resolve the case, and get all parties to communicate effectively, we had to find means of communication beyond telephone conversations. He also had other legal needs that he needed assistance with so we were able to set him up with representation he was comfortable with in the other fields. Every single client has a unique situation and a case that requires special attention and care. Sometimes this requires creative problem solving, and we strive to make sure that every single client, regardless of their situation, is given the best representation."

In another case that stands out in Greene's mind, she is reminded again of why she loves what she does. "My client was hauling a tractor trailer over the border because that was his job. He would routinely pick up trailers from lots and haul them over, leaving them at some location on the US side of the border. On this occasion he picked up a trailer and checked to ensure it was empty and in good condition to be hauled. He noticed nothing unusual about the trailer. He brought it over the border and was sent to secondary, and the agents located a false wall, and found a significant amount of marijuana hidden. There was no evidence that my client knew about the presence of the drugs,



but he remained in custody while we fought the case all the way to trial in federal court. I knew he was innocent and when the jury came back with non-guilty verdicts it was the best feeling in the world,” she recalls.

With passion for what she does, and unlimited potential for growth, what more could Greene want for the future? “My primary focus is on delivering exceptional results by making sure our clients are aware of all possible outcomes, that they know we are accessible by phone, email and text virtually around the clock, and by providing the best possible representation available.”

Not surprisingly, that focus has led to her practice growing each quarter. With three attorneys, a case manager and investigator along with support staff, the firm will undoubtedly add additional attorneys in the coming months and certainly years. Those joining forces with Greene will undoubtedly appreciate her pragmatic approach to work-life balance.

“We don’t have set hours at the office. We all know that our goal is to do the best we can for our clients. We know what hours we need to put in to do that, so attorneys can choose when they come into the office, and when they leave,” says Greene. Personally, Greene says that between lawyering and mothering, the time she spends working out is good for her clients, and her family. Exercising gives me the mental and physical stamina I need. I need that 60-90 minutes a day, where I have time to think without my phone ringing, checking my email or taking care of my kids,” she says honestly. In addition, she insists upon balancing work with her family life. “I spend as much time as I can with my husband and children doing fun activities, like swimming, going to parks, and attending school activities. We have wonderful kids, and an English Bulldog named The Fat-Mann,” she says with a laugh.

Though Greene is comfortable poking fun at herself by quipping “I’m actually really boring,” the cases coming her way, the results she’s getting for clients, and her thriving practice tell a different story. Still, Greene is anything but egotistical. On the contrary, she says simply, “I care about my clients and their cases and how their lives are being affected by the criminal process. Everyone deserves quality representation, and deserves an attorney who will listen to them, be honest with them, keep them informed of the status of their case, answer their questions, and be there for them from the start to the finish line.” ■

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EXPERIENCE



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» **EDUCATION**

- School Major Degree Graduated
- University of San Diego School of Law JD—Juris Doctor, 2001
- University of California at Santa Barbara Philosophy BA—Bachelor of Arts, 1997

» **WORK EXPERIENCE**

- Senior Partner, Sevens Legal, APC, 2011–Present
- Attorney, Law Office of Samantha Greene, 2011–Present
- Appellate Panel Attorney, Appellate Defenders, Inc., 2011–Present
- Deputy District Attorney, San Diego County District Attorney's Office, 2009–2011
- Senior Associates, Steigerwalt & Associates, 2002–2008
- Certified Law Clerk, San Diego County Office of The Public Defender, 2000–2000

» **AWARDS**

- Best of Bar San Diego Business Journal, 2014
- Top Lawyers San Diego Daily Transcript, 2014
- Top Lawyers San Diego Daily Transcript, 2012

» **ASSOCIATIONS**

- State Bar of California, 2002–Present
- Federal Bar Association (Southern District Of California), 2002–Present
- Federal Bar Association (Central District Of California), 2002–Present
- Federal Bar Association (Eastern District Of Texas), 2006–Present
- Federal Bar Association (Western District Of Virginia), 2004–Present