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THE POWER LIST

Lawyers Weekly's roster of the state's most influential attorneys

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Is power the ability to get a phone call returned? Or is it knowing whom to call? Is it rising to wealth and prominence at a big firm? Or is it building a small practice that fills an influential niche?

Lawyers Weekly consulted with attorneys, judges, political figures and others to create a list of the state's most powerful practitioners. The result is a collection of 81 names drawn from all fields of the law.

Power and the practice of law are inevitably linked. Lawyers, after all, are hired for their ability to help their clients, be it through a skilled argument in court, a persuasively written brief, or adept maneuvering through complicated bureaucratic systems.

But how does one define power, and how does one obtain it?

Ralph C. Martin II had statutory power as the Suffolk County district attorney and now wields a different brand of influence as the managing partner of Bingham McCutchen in Boston.

"A lot of influence is defined by relationships and how the broader world views you," Martin says.

"Sometimes that is based on fear ... sometimes it is based on whether you are a person who delivers. Do you do what you say you are going to do? Are you reliable and perceived as a can-do person? Getting your phone call returned is only one measure. You might get your call returned, but that doesn't mean you can get something done."

Thomas E. Dwyer Jr. of Boston's Dwyer & Collora says being a powerful practitioner "first ... involves com-

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petence. Second, experience. Third, the capacity to deal with an enormous amount of different personalities. And four, recognition that part of the crucial DNA of being a lawyer is service."

Michael B. Keating of Foley Hoag in Boston says that, to be powerful, one must be trustworthy.

"The training that we give attorneys tends to undersell the importance of personal relationships," he says. "Everyone wants to be technically a good lawyer and know the rules, but the feature of really good lawyers and powerful lawyers is

that they have forged relationships with other people and other attorneys and can serve their clients' interests more forcefully as a result."

Boston criminal defense attorney J.W. Carney Jr. says there are those who have power based on their position — say a judge or district attorney — and those who have it based on their connections.

"But there is another category of lawyer who has power because of the respect she has earned. They are the ones who are truly powerful because it doesn't come from their position or whom they know; rather, it comes from themselves," Carney says. "These are attorneys who have unwavering integrity, reflect a commitment to excellence, volunteer to make the bar better, but who also are willing to take an unpopular position supporting a client or an issue because it's the right thing to do."

The list is our attempt to identify those people in the law who can get things done, who wield influence beyond the bounds of their job title. Like all lists, it is certain to suffer from some omissions and perhaps flawed inclusions, but, also like all lists, it is a starting point for debate.

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