



→ Ian Carleton Schaefer

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Ian Carleton Schaefer is a partner in the Labor and Employment Practice Group in the firm's New York office.

Areas of Practice

When clients, predominantly sports leagues and their related sports clubs, entertainment industry giants, and professional services companies alike face their most existential, workplace management and crises management matters impacting reputation, Ian is the first-call. He also serves as outside-inside, parachute employment-counsel to an array of sports and entertainment clients on a day-to-day basis.

Recognized in "The Best Lawyers in America", "Super Lawyers" and the "Legal 500" for both Employment Law and Sports Law, clients call upon Ian for his "Go-To Thought Leadership" and his innovative solutions to workplace challenges. He has earned a reputation for his practical, business-enabling and results-driven approach to partnering with employers on the full spectrum of workplace and human capital initiatives, helping clients anticipate and respond to the impact of world events, social justice movements (#MeToo; Pay Equity; DEI), and an ever-evolving legal and digital landscape (AI and Privacy). He is a first-call from media such as The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, CNBC and Politico to provide insight and commentary on issues impacting the modern workplace.

In the sports space in particular, Ian has:

- For a professional sports club, successfully served as principal investigator for a professional sports club facing thorny allegations of harassment, age discrimination and retaliation, as well as alleged violations of the National Labor Relations Act.
- For a professional sports league, investigated the internal investigators making cross claims of bullying, racial discrimination and gender based harassment concurrent with an ongoing, high-profile investigation of a third-party athlete.
- For a professional sports league, designed and implemented complex executive transition strategies in the United States, Europe, Latin America and Asia, leading in the drafting and negotiation of transition agreements for scores of C-suite executives over a multi-year period, all while maintaining operational continuity.
- For a number of professional sports leagues, designed and delivery a suite of trainings ranging from anti-harassment and non-discrimination, bystander intervention, to executive training focused on leadership and professionalism, to one-on-one trainings for professional athletes and teams on both a proactive and remedial basis.

Similarly, whether investigating public or private allegations of individual or organizational misconduct, serving as strategic advisor on major workforce restructurings, shepherding clients through reputation management issues, conducting sensitive workplace audits around classification and pay equity, or facilitating complex C-suite transitions through executive compensation and employee relations strategies, Ian's practical, no-nonsense, business-enabling, and results-driven approach transforms challenging legal issues into impactful, business solutions.

Previously, Ian was a partner and a member of several international law firms, where among other accomplishments, he served as leader of his practice group, and co-authored the successful briefs in the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision *14 Penn Plaza v. Pyett*, a decision which modified 35 years of labor law.

A classically trained musician and an advocate for arts education, particularly in underserved communities, Ian has served as a Member of the Board of Directors of Jazz at Lincoln Center (Wynton Marsalis, Managing and Artistic Director) and President of the Board of Trustees (and alumnus) of the Grammy Award winning New York Youth Symphony.

Honors

- Go-To Thought Leader in Employment Law, *The National Law Review*, 2020
- Best Lawyers in America, Employment Law – Management, *The Best Lawyers in America*, 2019, 2022, 2023, 2025-2026
- Recognized by *The Legal 500 United States* in the areas of Workplace and Employment Counseling (2016-2019); Labor and Employment Disputes (including Collective Actions): Defense (2018-2019); and Sports (2022)
- New York Metro Rising Stars - Employment & Labor, *Super Lawyers*, 2011, 2013-2019, 2025

Experience

LITIGATION

- Successfully defended a prominent luxury retail client against a high-stakes class action alleging violations of Washington State's new Wage Transparency Act. By developing an innovative defense strategy and leveraging complex legal arguments, secured a complete dismissal of claims, preserving the clients reputation and avoiding potential multimillion-dollar exposure.
- Achieved a successful summary judgment on behalf of a major healthcare company, defeating claims of age discrimination and retaliation brought by a senior HR executive. This decisive win safeguarded the client from significant reputational and financial risks, while setting a critical precedent for employment-related disputes.
- Secured summary judgment in favor of a publicly traded gaming company, successfully defeating a breach of contract claim brought by a former senior executive on a claim of "material diminution of duties" argument triggering Good Reason.

INVESTIGATIONS

- Successfully served as principal investigator for a professional sports club facing thorny allegations of harassment, age discrimination and retaliation, as well as alleged violations of the National Labor Relations

Act.

- For a professional sports league, investigated the investigators making cross claims of bullying, racial discrimination and gender based harassment concurrent with an ongoing, high-profile investigation of a third-party.
- During the height of #MeToo, successfully lead the investigation and resolution of a potentially explosive claim against a C-suite executive of a global, publicly traded technology company alleging sexual harassment and sexual assault without any resultant litigation or public relations exposure.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT, HUMAN CAPITAL MANAGEMENT & WORKPLACE RESTRUCTURINGS

- For a professional sports league, designed and implemented complex executive transition strategies in the United States, Europe, Latin America and Asia, leading in the drafting and negotiation of transition agreements for scores of C-suite executives over a multi-year period, all while maintaining operational continuity.
- Served as COVID-19 reopening “czar” to dozens of organizations – across industry – across geography - facing issues attendant to mandatory vaccination policies, reasonable accommodations on disability and religious grounds, and drafted and advised on reopening guidelines and return to work/future of work plans.
- Lead scores of corporate restructuring initiatives, from furloughs to large scale reductions in force in response to shifts in economic and funding cycles, assisting organizations manage total headcount and total labor costs while maintaining operational continuity.
- Serves as outside-inside employment counsel to dozens of emerging company clients advising on policies, practices, procedures and various employee relations matters.
- In conjunction with a multi-disciplinary team including public relations professionals, advised several performing arts organizations facing potential reputational harm stemming from internal complaints surrounding race, ethnicity, gender levied against the organization and senior members of management.
- Lead a global technology company undergoing a multi-year, global workforce restructuring and organizational redesign, implicating issues of reductions in force and the WARN Act, wage and hour classification and reclassification, pay equity, executive compensation and employee benefit plan design, all with significant public relations, economic and employee relations implications.

COUNSELING, TRAINING AND COMPLIANCE

- Designed and delivered dozens of cutting-edge anti-harassment/non-discrimination and professionalism trainings to a professional sports leagues and several member clubs throughout the United States, a program which has subsequently been adapted and deployed to employers across industries and used to train hundreds of thousands of employees globally.
- Served as the architect and designer of modern employee handbooks reflecting an ever-shifting legal landscape, cultural trends and the migration from brick-and-mortar offices to fully virtual, distributed working environments, all in keeping with compliance from employment, corporate and tax perspectives.
- Advises a global consulting firm on risk management and compliance with federal, state and international law with respect to global lateral partner recruiting and hiring strategies and due diligence.

Articles

- Expecting the Unexpected: Ten Tips for Crisis Management in Sport
Sports Business Journal, 06.11.2024

Labor & Employment Law Blog Posts

- "Safety First for Retailers – New York Boosts Retail Safety with Mandatory Workplace Violence Prevention Plans, Annual Training Requirements and Panic Buttons," September 16, 2024
- "NYC Permits Private Right of Action for Earned Safe and Sick Time Violations," April 29, 2024
- "Necessity Is the Mother of Invention – But New York Law Says Employers Better Not Take the Credit," November 21, 2023
- "A Major Deal for the Minor League: California Bill Paves the Way for Historic Collective Bargaining Agreement for Minor League Baseball," October 18, 2023
- "The End of Non-Competes in New York? State Legislature Passes Non-Compete Ban Moving One Step Closer to the Edge," June 22, 2023

Media Mentions

Why have one career when you can have two? A lawyer's guide to classical music
Chelsea News NY, 06.17.2025

Workers Get Ready to Switch Jobs. Employers Are Fighting to Stop Them.
The Wall Street Journal, 04.25.2024

Federal Rules, State Action Complicate In-House Labor Strategies
Bloomberg Law, 04.18.2024

Legislative lowdown: SCOTUS edition
HR Brew, 07.13.2023

Companies Expect New Challenges to Diversity Policies After Court Ruling
The Wall Street Journal, 06.30.2023

Employers' diversity fear after Supreme Court affirmative action ban
The Times, 06.30.2023

Sheppard Mullin Partner Makes Debut As Orchestra Conductor
Law360, 06.16.2023

Vaccine Mandate Slated to End; Prepare for Pullbacks, Challenges in Personnel
Part B News, 05.11.2023

Events

Labor and Employment Law Mid-Year Update Webinar
Virtual, 06.03.2025

Labor & Employment Law Update - Year in Review & Look Ahead
Sheppard Mullin New York, 11.14.2024

Tech Me Up! Session #6: AI at Work - Taking the "Human" out of Human Resources?
11.15.2023

Labor & Employment Law Update - Year In Review
Studio Gather 45 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, NY 10020, 11.02.2023

Memberships

Member, American Employment Law Council (AELC)

Member, International Labor & Employment Law Section, American Bar Association

President-Elect of the Board of Trustees, New York Youth Symphony

Member of the Board of Directors, Jazz at Lincoln Center (Wynton Marsalis, Managing and Artistic Director)
(2021-2025)

Podcasts & Webinars

Labor & Employment Law Mid-Year Update
06.03.2025

Labor & Employment Law Update - Year in Review & Look Ahead
11.14.2024

Labor & Employment Law Update - Year In Review
11.02.2023

Practices

Labor and Employment

International Reach

Canada

France

Industries

Entertainment, Technology and Advertising

Financial Services

Healthcare

Life Sciences

Music

Nonprofit

Retail, Fashion & Beauty

Sports

Education

J.D., Fordham University School of Law, *cum laude*, Symposium Editor, Fordham Urban Law Journal

B.S., Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations

Admissions

New York

Supreme Court of the United States

U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York

U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York