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By Patrick Foliard

Marco A. Gonzalez Jr. Taking the Hill

Great attorneys use a variety of tools to help their clients—not all of which come from law school. Marco A. Gonzalez Jr. taps into an arsenal garnered in the U.S. Marine Corps. “Having been a Marine, I more readily think outside of the box about how to decisively solve a client’s problem, about how to ‘take the hill,’ ” says Gonzalez, a litigation partner in Duane Morris LLP’s Newark, N.J., office. “At a young age, I was the sergeant of a 60-man infantry platoon that I managed, trained, and motivated. Years later, I employ those same skills at the firm. My associates are willing to do what needs to be done to win in legal combat.

“Like a soldier, a good litigator must be disciplined and comfortable with chain of command,” adds Gonzalez. “In both military and legal arenas, it’s important to know your adversary as well as yourself. Often, winning depends on it. I bring this ethic to my work.”

At Duane Morris, an international law firm, Gonzalez practices in the areas of complex civil and environmental litigation, products liability, internal corporate investigations, and white-collar criminal defense. As a member of the firm’s Puerto Rico Practice Group, Gonzalez represents clients on federal matters in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. He also co-chairs Duane Morris’ Cuba Initiative, assisting companies to participate in that emerging market under exemptions to the U.S. trade embargo, and to prepare for general trade with Cuba after the embargo is lifted.



Marco A. Gonzalez Jr.

Gonzalez is the product of a tightly knit Latino family that stressed hard work and education. (His father was a Cuban immigrant, and his mother is Puerto Rican.) Growing up in the famously tough South Bronx, Gonzalez cleverly avoided gang culture by persuading its members that he was “too nerdy” to be of service to them. He spent summers working long hours for little pay in his father’s bodega/butcher shop; the rest of the year was crammed with homework and countless activities, including wrestling, student government, and the debate team.

Following high school, Gonzalez enlisted in the Marines. Later, while serving as an aircraft structural specialist on the F-117A Stealth Fighter Project for the former Lockheed-California Company, Gonzalez was elected union shop steward by his non-Marine coworkers. “As shop steward, I dealt mostly with routine paperwork, but sometimes I filed grievances,” he recalls. “A particular grievance led me to the UCLA law library, where I did some research and wrote a memo supporting my crew’s position. A week later, I reported to the plant manager’s office in my dirty coveralls and negotiated a deal with company lawyers. One of the attorneys, a Mexican

American, told me afterward that I was in the wrong business, and that I should consider going to college and law school. That's where the seed to enter the legal profession first germinated."

After graduating from Hunter College of the City University of New York, Gonzalez attended Rutgers School of Law. Far from cowed by the Socratic method, he argued endlessly with professors and classmates alike. During his second year, he participated in a legal clinic that required him to accompany professors and volunteer lawyers to court, where they represented clients with Constitutional law claims. The experience hooked him on

litigation. Later, as a young associate at a Morristown, N.J., firm, Gonzalez volunteered to represent indigent women in domestic violence cases, most of which resulted in short but intense full-blown bench trials.

Not only is Gonzalez bicultural, but he also possesses a trove of varied life experience. "It's definitely an asset to clients," asserts Gonzalez. "I'm comfortable in both the front office and on an assembly line with engineers and technicians. When I'm conducting an internal investigation for a corporation, I take off my suit jacket, roll up my sleeves, and learn what's really happening in the factory. A lot of the time,

workers are apprehensive speaking with lawyers. That's usually not the case with me."

For the foreseeable future, Gonzalez's goal is to remain a productive partner at Duane Morris and to continue providing his clients with quality legal counsel. Gonzalez also wants to expand the firm's influence in Latin America and the Caribbean and, ultimately, open a Duane Morris office in his father's native city, Havana.

Sounds like the perfect tour of duty for Gonzalez. **DB**

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