

MVP: Cravath's David J. Perkins

By Jade Martinez-Pogue

Law360 (November 13, 2024) -- David Perkins of Cravath Swaine & Moore LLP advised Amentum in its all-stock, reverse Morris trust merger with Jacobs' government services businesses that created a combined company with \$13 billion in revenue, and also led Brookfield Renewable Partners in its \$8 billion acquisition of Westinghouse, earning him a spot as one of the 2024 Law360 Private Equity MVPs.

His biggest accomplishment:

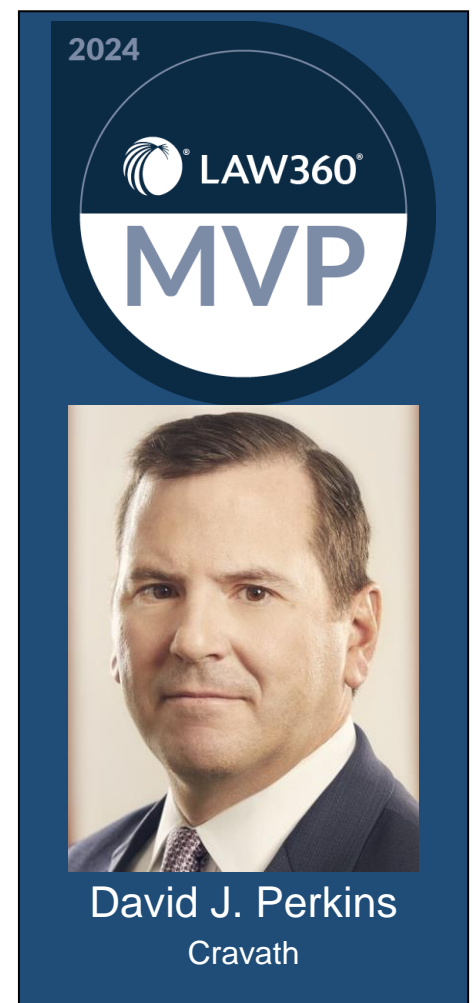
When reflecting about his biggest accomplishment over the past year, Perkins points to his involvement in representing Amentum, a portfolio company of Lindsay Goldberg and American Securities, in its RMT merger with Jacobs' Critical Mission Solutions and Cyber & Intelligence government services businesses.

The deal, which created a publicly traded company with more than \$13 billion in revenue, wasn't the typical RMT merger in which one of the entities being combined is a public company. Amentum was a private company with two controlling sponsors, creating unique challenges to get the deal inked, Perkins said.

"That was probably the most complicated transaction I've worked on recently — maybe ever. There were a lot of thorny issues, but whenever you're able to partner with clients and ... complete a transaction, it's really rewarding," he told Law360.

Aside from navigating the complexities of the deal, Perkins had a special connection to the case that dates to his time serving in the military in Afghanistan. Perkins served as an officer in the U.S. Army in a multitude of infantry assignments before being recalled to active duty in 2008 to serve as an embedded adviser to the Afghan National Police in southern Afghanistan, where he ultimately attained the rank of major.

"Years ago, when I was still in the Army in Afghanistan, we had contractors assigned to my team — police trainers — and those people were employed by what is now Amentum, so the deal brought things back full circle for me," he said.



His biggest challenge:

Aside from helping clients get deals done, Perkins said the biggest and most challenging task over the past year has been helping Cravath build out its private equity practice.

Perkins got into the private equity space nearly a decade ago on the real estate and funds side, and after going "where the clients took" him, he turned more toward the traditional private equity/mergers and acquisitions practice area, he said. Now, as co-head of Cravath's private equity group, growing that practice area has been a task that's "largely fallen" on his shoulders, Perkins said.

"Private equity is not a history Cravath is known for; most people associate us with corporate strategic mergers and acquisitions," Perkins said. "Building this practice has been tremendously challenging over the last year and tremendously rewarding ... I'm fortunate enough to be on the ground floor of it, constantly thinking about where the next opportunities are coming from, how the junior partners are being set up for success. Really being able to lead, mentor, coach and manage our small but growing group has been really valuable to me."

Why he is a private equity attorney:

When Perkins first started working with private equity professionals, he saw early on how attracted he was to the investor mindset and working with clients who are "very skilled at what they do."

"The transactions private equity investors look at are very challenging and very rewarding. Our clients, they're very, very smart and adept at solving those thorny issues," he said. "Early on, I knew that was for me."

Perkins said he knew private equity was going to be an area where he "felt very much at home" because of how his clients were thinking about their transactions and solving their problems without creating new ones.

"It felt to me that that was really a shared value with our private equity clients and something that I've built the rest of my career on," he said.

What motivates him:

When thinking about what motivates him the most, Perkins reflected on two potential answers: professionally, his motivation comes from the constant striving to solve new problems, and in the more general picture, it's growing and developing the private equity team at Cravath that drives him.

Perkins said that, as a transactional lawyer, he likes to work on transactions "very deeply" and then move right on to figuring out how to solve the next one.

"On a macro level, what motivates me every day is growing the team here. There's a through line here — what used to motivate me every day as a young lieutenant and a captain in the Army are a lot of the things that motivate me today," Perkins explained.

"I love coaching, training and motivating the young lawyers on the team," he added, noting that, following the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, it "has become more challenging to have that sense of human connection, so it's about adapting to the new normal and figuring out new ways to develop and train in this new environment."

His advice for junior attorneys:

"It is absolutely a relationship business," Perkins said when asked what advice he would impart to younger attorneys.

In some practice areas, Perkins said, you might not have the same clients over and over again. But in private equity, you form relationships with those large institutions, and oftentimes, people have known each other for "a number of years," he added.

"I just try to encourage those younger lawyers to build those bonds at their level. The titles of the clients might be different, but (private equity firms) have junior partners just like us, associates just like us," Perkins said. "Have those late nights, unscripted conversations with clients, because, professionally, you will gain a lot out of it. As lawyers, being able to understand and incorporate the client's way of thinking into how we approach a problem has a lot of real value."

--As told to Jade Martinez-Pogue. Editing by Melissa Treolo.

Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2024 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 900 submissions.

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