

Immigration MVP: Morgan Lewis' A. James Vazquez-Azpiri

By Kelly Knaub

Law360, New York (December 6, 2016, 6:42 PM EST) -- Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP's A. James Vazquez-Azpiri has recently served as lead partner representing companies such as Seagate, Samsung Research America and Applied Materials in sophisticated business immigration matters, earning him a place on Law360's 2016 list of Immigration MVPs.

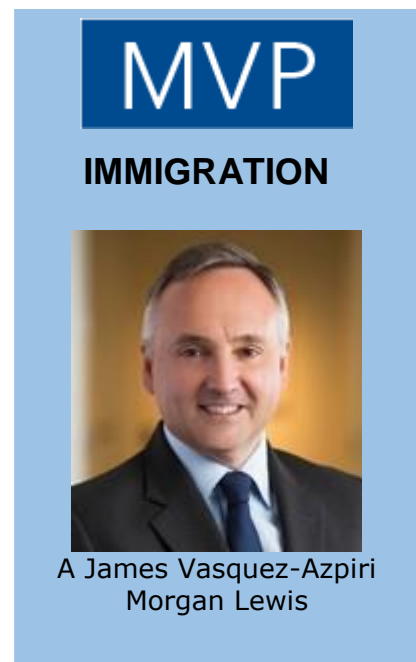
Vazquez-Azpiri has led his firm's representation of Samsung in a broad range of domestic and global immigration matters for the opening the company's new \$1 billion Strategy and Innovation Center in Menlo Park, California. His work has included securing green cards for highly qualified employees there through the little-used Schedule A Group II programs.

Vazquez-Azpiri also oversaw the crafting of Samsung's new comprehensive immigration policy and advised the company in various I-9 employment verification matters as well as on the establishment of its E-Verify employment verification system. He also recently led the Morgan Lewis team that helped Samsung obtain visas for a number of high-profile executives.

Vazquez-Azpiri attended college in Scotland, studied at the University of California in Los Angeles for his junior year and, after graduating in 1985, went to Princeton University to study 16th and 17th Spanish Literature and embark upon a Ph.D. As a student at Princeton, Vazquez-Azpiri said he had to navigate a number of obstacles imposed by U.S. immigration law — such as obtaining a visa and employment authorization — which constituted his first real exposure to the intricacies of U.S. immigration law.

"It was there that I really started developing an intellectual interest in the immigration process," Vazquez-Azpiri told Law360.

Vazquez-Azpiri's burgeoning interest in immigration law, coupled with the early 1990s tech boom in Silicon Valley that created the opportunity to provide legal services to companies wanting to hire and retain foreign workers, is what kicked off his now 24-year legal career.



After completing a master's degree at Princeton, Vazquez-Azpiri pursued his law degree at the New York University School of Law and later earned a Master of Laws in international and transnational law from Harvard Law School.

At NYU, professor Arthur Helton — an expert in refugee and asylum law who was tragically killed during a 2003 bombing in Iraq — nurtured Vazquez-Azpiri's interest in immigration law. Vazquez-Azpiri said he was privileged to have been one of Helton's students and was one of the few NYU students who took both of his classes.

Vazquez-Azpiri has built a strong practice counseling global and expanding corporations on hiring and retaining foreign employees — complex work that requires profound knowledge of an intricate system of laws and regulations. He also guides clients through immigration law compliance during mergers, acquisitions and corporate restructurings.

In addition to Samsung, Vazquez-Azpiri has also led the team's representation of computer data storage company Seagate in all of its global mobility immigration work, which entailed significant inbound and outbound movement of global legal talent to support a dramatic expansion of the company, according to Morgan Lewis.

Under Vazquez-Azpiri's guidance, the firm counsels Seagate on its increasingly ambitious and complex program of international global mobility, which involves employees and management worldwide, according to Morgan Lewis.

Vazquez-Azpiri and his team are also representing Applied Materials — which has more than 14,000 employees across the globe and is one of the largest suppliers of products and services to the global semiconductor industry — in all its immigration and global mobility services.

Applied Materials retained Morgan Lewis because of Vazquez-Azpiri's experience in the technology industry and his team's ability to handle a significant volume of work efficiently, Morgan Lewis noted.

"It's a very sophisticated client as far as their immigration process is concerned," Vazquez-Azpiri said of Applied Materials, which is one of the firm's newer clients and one of its largest as well. "It has one of the best and most mature in-house immigration programs in the country, and it's a privilege to be working with a client of that sophistication."

Vazquez-Azpiri was born and raised in Madrid to an English mother and a Bolivian father with Cuban roots and attended boarding school in England.

Following the first five years of his legal career at Morrison & Foerster, he moved on to Cooley Godward Kronish LLP and stayed there for seven years. He joined Morgan Lewis in early 2005.

In addition to cultural sensitivity, Vazquez-Azpiri said personal sensitivity to a client's frustrations and anxieties is needed to be successful in what he does, as well as a good measure of patience in dealing with the various U.S. agencies that regulate the immigration process.

A thorough mastery of the authorities that control immigration law is needed as well, he said, noting that immigration law, unlike other areas of law, is more of a patchwork of different sources.

"We have some statutes, we have some regulations that often conflict with each other. We don't have a really developed body of case law, and often we have to rely on memorandum put out by various agencies and often even just comments made by officers of agencies at various public meetings," Vazquez-Azpiri said. "You really have to be on top of everything that's happening and these things happen almost every week that tweak your practice in little ways. So you have to be constantly on top of that constantly changing body of law as it occurs. You can't afford to fall behind in any way because then you're not representing your clients effectively."

--Editing by Jill Coffey.

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