

They've Got Next: **The 40 Under 40**40
40

Helam Gebremariam

Age: 40

Law Firm: Cravath, Swaine & Moore

Practice Area: Litigation

Title: Partner

Location: New York

Law School: New York University
School of Law

Helam Gebremariam of Cravath, Swaine & Moore

Lisa Helem, Executive Editor | MP McQueen, Editor | August 12, 2025

Please describe two of your most substantial, recent wins in practice.

I was part of the Cravath trial team that won a decision, affirmed on appeal, for Tesla CEO Elon Musk, defeating stockholder derivative litigation that sought \$13 billion and alleged that Tesla's acquisition of SolarCity was a thinly veiled bailout.

Given the paramount importance of fair price, we focused heavily on evidence showing SolarCity was a uniquely valuable company. We also argued the deal was the culmination of Tesla's "Master Plan" to become the world's first vertically integrated clean energy and technology company. After an 11-day trial, during which I examined and prepared several witnesses, the court ruled in Mr. Musk's favor—one of the only post-trial defense verdicts decided under the entire fairness standard.

I was also a key member of the would-be trial team for Forward Air in litigation which sought to compel the company to close its proposed acquisition of Omni Newco. On the day the trial was scheduled to begin, we reached a resolution that amended the merger agreement on terms favorable to Forward Air. I handled multiple depositions, which helped strengthen our client's argument that Omni had not complied with certain of its obligations under the merger agreement, and that closing conditions had not been met.

What is the most important lesson you learned as a first-year attorney and how does it inform your practice today?

As an attorney, it is imperative to understand your role as an advocate—focusing on the interests of your client and prioritizing not only achieving the best result in the matter you are handling, but also the best result for the client's ultimate business goals and concerns.

For each new matter I take on, I pay close attention to the relevant case law, trends in the wider market and the client's position and trajectory in its industry. Taken together, this background informs every decision I make about the legal strategy going forward, as well as the counsel I provide to my clients.

Attorneys and the parties we represent are a cohesive partnership—working in tandem toward the same vision and outcome. Working as a unit with your clients and operating through client-centered decision-making is what makes you a true adviser, and this objective continues to inform my legal practice today.

How do you define success in your practice?

I define success in my practice by the depth of the relationships I have fostered with my clients, particularly as it manifests in their continued trust—whether they seek my counsel for an additional case, refer their contacts to me or request a second opinion on matters unrelated to the case at hand.

To me, this indicates clients' confidence in my ability to intuitively understand their most pressing needs, adopt their long-term objectives as my own and successfully execute them regardless of the circumstance. That earned trust is invaluable to me, and I view it as a testament that I have proven my abilities as a litigator, a problem solver, and my clients' confidant.

What are you most proud of as a lawyer?

I take great pride in the trial work I have done on behalf of my clients. Trials can often be a drawn-out, lengthy and challenging process for clients—with material consequences for their business.

I strive to be the proven resource whom my clients can wholly rely on in their times of highest risk as well as the point person to successfully litigate at the highest standard. I believe that by design, handling every stage of litigation as though trial is inevitable sets us up to provide the best possible outcome for our clients. This preparation includes devising creative case strategies, tailoring arguments to your audience and forum and anticipating and neutralizing adverse witness testimonies.

These components all contribute to effectively communicating our client's position to the judge or jury and this ability to distill complex information into a digestible form has a tremendous impact on the court's ultimate decision. I deeply value the trust my clients place in me and am mindful of the immense responsibility I bear when representing them during such a critical time. Securing a win or favorable outcome for our clients makes being a lawyer that much more fulfilling.

Who is your greatest mentor in the law and what have they taught you?

At Cravath, I had the immense privilege of working alongside Evan Chesler—one of the country's most esteemed litigators. Evan and I met during my summer associate interview, and we instantly connected over our shared experience as first-generation lawyers.

Evan set the perfect example for the kind of lawyer I dreamed of becoming. He taught me how to refine a strategic vision and masterfully prepare for a case, which influenced the eventual development of my own advocacy style.

One of the major trials we worked on together was in litigation concerning Tesla's acquisition of SolarCity. Not only was this a high-profile trial, but it came at a key transition point in my career. I started on the case as a senior associate and was elected a partner shortly before trial began.

Each step of the way, Evan was there to provide encouragement and support—particularly as I prepared to examine an expert witness during the trial. Evan would often comment that while mistakes may happen from time for time, given the pace and pressure of our day-to-day, "there is only one mistake that is irreparable—overstepping on the facts and law and damaging your credibility." To this day, his advice informs the way I carry myself as an attorney—with dedication, integrity and an aspiration to hold myself to the highest standard.

Tell us your two favorite songs on your summer music playlist.

Bill Withers' "Lovely Day" and—in anticipation of the concert of the summer—anything off Beyoncé's Cowboy Carter.