An Inclusive Interview

Equity in Justice

with Chrystian J. Gonzalez, Esq.



The mission of the State Bar of New Mexico's Equity in Justice Program is to cultivate and grow a legal profession in New Mexico that is representative of and reflective of the people of New Mexico. As part of that mission, we bring you the series "Inclusive Interviews." We call these *inclusive* interviews both as a play on words and as a contrast to the term "Exclusive Interview."

Because legal employers with inclusive hiring and employment practices have a bigger talent pool from which to hire and access to a larger client base, these interviews serve to amplify that growing and cultivating inclusivity and belonging in our profession is beneficial to all legal employers; be they private firms, government entities or nonprofits.

This Inclusive Interview is with Chrystian J. Gonzalez, Esq. Chrystian has been practicing law for five years and is a Children's Court Attorney for the New Mexico Children, Youth, and Families Department. He also currently serves as a Bar Commissioner for the 3rd and 6th Judicial Districts on the State Bar of New Mexico Board of Bar Commissioners.

Q: What is your background?

A: I am a first generation Mexican American, born in El Paso, Texas. My parents are originally from El Paso's sister city, Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico. I am also a veteran of the United States Air Force, where I served as an active-duty enlisted member for six years, earning the rank of Staff Sergeant. During my service, I trained and supervised incoming airmen and participated in deployments supporting pre and post-9/11 missions, such as Operations Northern Watch, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom.

Q: What made you want to become a lawyer?

A: The idea of pursuing a career as an attorney had not occurred to me until one of my college philosophy professors talked to me about law school and becoming an attorney. Had he not planted this seed of possibility, I might not have considered it an achievable path. But my curiosity and desire for success motivated me to try; so, I went for it. And that meeting having made all the difference, I now try to plant the same seed every chance I get. While I have always been drawn to serving my community, I am beyond captivated with the combination of analytical thinking with advocacy, and with using knowledge to empower others and create fairness out of a legal dispute.

Q: What has been your greatest accomplishment in your legal career or of what in your legal career are you the most proud?

A: To put it simply, I am most proud of reaching my clients' goals in a case. The most satisfying moment for me as an attorney is when a judge grants the final order, my client and I share a final handshake, and the case is successfully concluded. Helping a client finalize a legal process that has caused them significant stress truly brings profound fulfillment.

Q: What has been the biggest challenge you have had in your legal career?

A: My biggest challenges come from my current position as a Children's Court Attorney. Collaborating with social workers and investigators to assess a family's situation can be heartbreaking when we find that legal limitations prevent us from assisting them. The law tends to be reactive rather than proactive by design, which is usually quite effective, but also disappointing when it fails, especially in cases of abuse or neglect of children.

Q: What is your favorite part of your current position?

A: Dismissing a case, particularly when children are reunified with their parents, is a joyous occasion in the courtroom that everyone that is present cannot help but celebrate. Also, completing a child or sibling adoption, especially when they have been waiting a long time to finalize. It is wonderful to witness these moments.

Q: What is your advice for other veterans who want to become lawyers?

A: If any fellow veteran is considering this path, I would assume that they may feel as I did: unprepared for new territory and doubting the probabilities of success. The Air Force had three tenets that I still hold to: integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do. These are ingrained as we set out to learn the many useful skills needed to thrive in the military, from hospital corners to strategic thinking, and experiences in a world much bigger than the one we came from. In my experience, many people join the military because they want to be a part of something bigger, and because they want to make something of themselves. I believe I was better prepared as a veteran than I ever would have been as a recent graduate. Joining the legal community is no different. What's more, the fundamental rules are the same, except the armory is in the law books and the fight is the courtroom. So, I would encourage others to just go for it and not look back.

Q: If you could have one superpower, what would it be, and why?

A: The Flash, of course! If every time I were headed to Court, I could familiarize myself with the entire Code, relevant caselaw, pleadings, and evidence in a matter of seconds, I would be unstoppable. But it also wouldn't hurt to have Barry Allen's metabolism and enjoy seconds and even dessert after every meal.

Q: What is something the legal profession in New Mexico can do to be more inclusive?

A: I think the New Mexico Bar is actively advancing inclusivity consciously and continuously. This very project is creating space and opportunities for veterans, and other individuals from diverse backgrounds, to feel more welcomed and supported within the legal profession. Still, there is always more that can be done. One meaningful way the legal community can become even more inclusive is by expanding outreach and support for aspiring legal professionals from rural, Indigenous, and Hispanic communities. These groups represent a significant portion of our state's population yet remain underrepresented in the legal field. I believe that nothing is more important than this effort and taking active steps to make these goals a reality creates a legal profession that would better serve both its members and its community

Interested in being the subject of an Inclusive Interview?

Contact SBNM Equity in Justice Attorney Abby Lewis at abby.lewis@sbnm.org.

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