

As a partner at Johnson & Bell, James E. Phelan is known as a strong advocate for his clients and someone who will not hesitate to take a case to trial. His extensive experience includes representing companies in defense of large scale construction defect litigation, product liability litigation, and transportation litigation in state and federal court. Phelan has first chaired numerous Law Division jury cases to verdict in Cook and Grundy counties throughout his career. In fact, every Law Division case tried by Phelan has resulted in a no liability finding for his client, or an award at or less than the final pretrial offer. He also has substantial experience in representing clients in binding arbitrations, as well as private mediations.

One of his greatest assets is his personality, said attorney Sara Marzullo "Jim is unique because he has a great deal of personal and professional integrity. He has assisted my practice on complex matters involving questions of conflict and ethics with great success," said Marzullo. "He is able to put aside his personal ego and bring opposing sides together to resolve cases. I think that is becoming a lost art in these trying times."

"It is refreshing to work with a lawyer unburdened by cynicism, and a true believer in the wisdom and the practice of the law," said attorney William Furey, who has known Phelan for more than ten years. "Jim is confident of his skills in understanding, representing, and defending his clients. He expects the same of those with whom he works and in so doing, he makes all of us and the process itself better for the experience."

Even opponents, such as one nominating attorney, respect Phelan. A nominator who has lost cases to Phelan voiced unequivocal respect for his adversary, humbly calling Phelan the better attorney. "Jim is emblematic of his generation's view of 'litigator.' It is no longer 'eat 'em up and spit 'em out,' mean, dirty, and nasty. The developed, evolved, more professional approach is calmness, co-operation, competency, honesty, and integrity. Jim is the 'poster lawyer' of this effective – very effective – approach," said the nominating attorney. "He beat me twice. I am 0-2 with Jim, and he did it fair and square, and with great advocacy and grace. He showed me how 'delivery' is as important as the remark," the nominating attorney said.

One nominator who worked with Phelan for about five years recalled Phelan's ability to quickly grasp the business of a litigation firm. "This firm handles many complex, high-exposure, multi-party cases. There is always a lot of maneuvering between the players which include attorneys, parties and insurance carriers. Jim was excellent at sorting the players, recognizing where he and his client fit in, creating a strategy for optimal success and carrying it out," said the nominating attorney. "There are some lawyers who can be trusted from the start to do their job, manage the client and get good results while, at the same time, staying calm and professional. Jim is one of those lawyers. He is a bold and convincing voice in the courtroom."

Some people simply have the personality for trial work; Phelan is one of those people, according to William Oberts of Tribler Orpett & Meyer. "He is a driven and respectful advocate who is willing to work with the other side to reach a common ground for the benefit of his client," Oberts said. "Jim's passion for the law is evident as he will often discuss new developments in the law outside of the work place and keep abreast on recent court decisions."

He attended Loyola University, graduating with his bachelor degree in 1994. He earned his J.D. from DePaul University College of Law and was admitted to practice law in Illinois in 1997.



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A bold and convincing voice in the courtroom.