

TWO MINUTES

Corps values

Joe Campolo

Veteran attorney imbues firm with Marine precepts

As a former corporal in the U.S. Marine Corps, Joe Campolo led a battalion of 17 into battle. Although he's no longer defending his country, Campolo, as managing partner at Bohemia-based Campolo, Middleton & McCormick, has recently been fighting injustices, working to reverse the MTA Payroll Tax and recover money for the victims of the Agape World Ponzi scheme. Campolo took some time on this Veterans Day to give updates on those cases, and talk about his military-influenced law practice.



What have you taken from your military career and implemented at the firm?

The Marine Corps is one of the greatest entities in the world. They have some of very basic tenets that have defined my life, and certainly influence my practice.

For example, there's a saying that you never leave a Marine behind. If it costs more men to take the dead off the battlefield, so be it. You never leave another Marine behind.

Now, compare that to the typical Wall Street backstabbing culture, and you see there's just such a difference.

Also, in the Marines, troops eat first - that's a very big part of me. I had 17 guys reporting to me in the Marine Corps, and if there were limited rations of food, the troops would eat first. That's how it is here. Compare that to Wall Street where the top end executives get everything and then it trickles down if there's any left over. We don't run it that way here. We lead by example.

How did you get involved representing the victims of the Agape World Ponzi scheme?

We got involved simply because it was outrageous what was happening there. Our clients are all hard-working, decent people who were robbed. Many of our clients were elderly and are ill. We're not talking about a lot of money: it's \$40,000 or \$60,000, but it's their whole life savings. We got aggressively involved on our own time to protect their rights and recover whatever money we can.

We're continuing depositions now and we've gotten very favorable court decisions. The problem, as everybody knows, is that you're trying to recover money from criminals because they've done everything they can to hide the money. But we are not going to give up until we have no stone left unturned.

Are you doing this pro bono? We're doing it on a very, very reduced rate. We're just covering whatever hard costs we have.

Did you agree with the 25-year sentence that Nick Cosmo got? You know, I was very surprised. I interned with Judge (Denis) Hurley, who sentenced him, and to me he's an incredibly fair and decent judge - very fair and smart. I know he gave it a lot of thought and certainly did what in his head he thought was right. I just thought it was interesting that Denny Chin, the judge that sentenced Madoff, realized how many lives Madoff had ruined and was much more aggressive in the sentencing of Madoff, and that Judge Hurley was not as aggressive.

The interesting difference though is that Nick Cosmo had already been a felon; he had already lost his license. Madoff didn't. These were hardened criminals that were working there. To me, that's not accidental, that's a choice and a couple of strikes.

I had to explain to my clients about the sentence because they were a little surprised that he didn't get as harsh a sentence as Bernie Madoff had received.

Do you think clients got closure from this sentence?

I think they probably have gotten closure from that and probably have moved on with their lives. I think they feel it'd be nice if they were able to recover money, but they're very well aware that that's a difficult thing to do. But from my perspective, I won't be able to have closure for my clients until we are able to get them some kind of financial recovery.

How did you first get involved with the MTA tax?

One of our clients, Bill Schoolman, who owns Hamptons Luxury Liner, came into my office up in arms over the MTA tax and asked me to look at it. I agreed and we started with the New York State Constitution, where blatant things seemed to be popping off the page to me because it just seemed like they weren't followed when the MTA Payroll Tax got passed. For example, you need a two-thirds majority in both houses of the Legislature to pass a special law - a law that only applies to a portion of the state. They didn't have that. So we filed a lawsuit, and contemporaneously, we started Tax Relief Now. That started a movement that directly resulted in two state senators not getting re-elected.

Since we filed our initial lawsuit, there are about 12 to 15 other lawsuits. All of these suits are pending. At the end of the day, politics as usual in New York state is over. We already won. So, I'm very proud of the fact that our firm sort of spearheaded that event and I lived every moment of it and it was fantastic.