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Diversity Profile - Sam Felker

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Sam Felker grew up in Brownsville, Tennessee, home to superstars such as Tina Turner and the women on which Tanya Tucker's famed "Delta Dawn" was based. Despite these illustrious neighbors, he lived an ordinary life in the small western Tennessee town. Both of his parents were high school teachers who worked diligently to ensure the best for him and his brothers. Their work ethic inspired him immensely, as they taught him the importance of hard work, treating others fairly and performing tasks well. Felker has "tremendous respect for teachers because they have a tough job, but [knows] first-hand how they can have a very positive influence on their students and the community."

Felker went on to bleed maroon as an alumnus of Mississippi State University. While pursuing his undergraduate degree, he majored in journalism and wrote for the campus newspaper. Felker was presented with a life-changing opportunity after the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) put Mississippi State University on probation for football recruiting violations. He was entrusted with the responsibility of writing an article about the ensuing court case for the school newspaper. Throughout the course of the assignment, Felker followed the case intently and interacted with several lawyers. This exposure to the court system ignited his interest in law.

For a period of time, Felker delayed his dream of attending law school in order to further craft his journalism skills. He worked for several newspapers, including *The Commercial Appeal* in Memphis. Afterward, he attended The University of Virginia School of Law.

"I was attracted to UVA because of its traditions, its outstanding academic reputation, the diversity of its students, and the perfect college town – Charlottesville." Upon graduation, Felker started as a transactional commercial lawyer in the area of asset-based lending. He jokes, "sounds boring, right?" but the work was enough to keep his passion for law burning bright. Felker maintains that, "There is nothing wasted in the practice of law and further down the road the skills I learned drafting contracts and loan documents came in handy."

Felker is now a shareholder in the Firm's Nashville office and a member of the Product Liability/Mass Tort Group. He has focused his litigation practice on the defense of product liability, food safety, mass torts and commercial cases. In recognition of his extraordinary work ethic, Felker is rated in the AV® Preeminent™ Peer Review by Martindale-Hubbell. He is also listed in *Best Lawyers in America®* and *Mid-South Super Lawyers* since 2006, and has been named to *Lawdragon Leading 3000 Lawyers in America*.

Felker attributes his success to hard work, combined with outstanding mentoring from talented and caring lawyers. One such lawyer is Wilson Sims, a senior partner at his prior firm. Sims taught Felker the importance of working hard and delivering an excellent result for the client, and the art of managing client expectations. Sims also introduced him to the "do right rule," which holds that lawyers should advise clients to do what is right – not just to stay within the bounds of the law.

Felker advises lawyers who are just beginning their careers that, "The first few years of practice are all about doing excellent legal work on every single matter you handle, no matter how small. Second, begin building a

referral network starting with your law school classmates and friends – you will be surprised where they will end up."

He also encourages others to make time for personal health and well-being. Fitness is a big priority for him, and over the years he has become especially interested in cycling. As an adventure enthusiast, he once traveled from San Francisco to Los Angeles on his bike.

Not only does Felker encourage personal wellbeing, but he also spends time ensuring that the needs of others are met. Currently, he serves on the board of the Metro Nashville Health Department, working to make Nashville a more active and healthier place to live and work. The Department works to better Nashville through frequent and effective opportunities for food inspections, animal control, vaccinations, disease prevention and much more. Felker also serves as president of the Stonewall Bar Association of Tennessee, an organization that promotes LGBT diversity in the legal profession and advocates for equality under the law for LGBT individuals.

In the 18 short months he's been at the Firm, Felker has already made significant contributions to our culture and our clients, and is continuing his more than 30 years of leadership in the Nashville community.