

**Neal Manne**

SUSMAN GODFREY (HOUSTON)



# NEAL MANNE

**WHEN NEAL MANNE**, 56, was formally introduced as co-managing partner of Houston-based Susman Godfrey in September 2011, the legal press more than took note. Steve Susman and Lee Godfrey are the only lawyers at the 32-year-old world-class boutique to hold the title of managing partner. As both are now in their 70s, adding Manne as a third managing partner effectively anointed him the heir apparent. So it's not surprising the news of his ascendancy to the helm of the litigation powerhouse known for multimillion-dollar verdicts and six-figure associate bonuses was treated as something like a coronation

Manne wasn't plucked from the firm's obscure partner ranks. He joined the firm in 1988 after spending several years in Washington, DC, as chief of staff for U.S. Senator Arlen Specter and chief counsel to the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee's subcommittee on juvenile justice. Since then, Manne has made a name for himself as a star litigator as deserving of the spotlight as Susman, one of the most famous trial lawyers in the U.S. and the colorful half of the firm name. He's won major trials for both plaintiffs and defendants, representing a varied array of clients from energy companies to modern art icon Robert Rauschenberg.

Manne's reputation extends beyond his private practice to his pro-bono work. In 1994, the National Women's Political Caucus named him as the national "Good Guy of the Year," along with then Vice-President Al Gore, for his successful representation of Planned Parenthood and other women's health clinics.

**LAWDRAGON:** What made you decide to take on the managing partner role at this time?

**NEAL MANNE:** I've spent most of my career practicing law at Susman Godfrey, and I deeply appreciate the opportunities I've been given here, including the opportunity to serve as a managing partner. I have been involved in firm management, both formally and informally, for many years, so perhaps I was a natural choice. But I'm very glad my partners elected me, and I will do what I can to ensure that we all work together for many years to come. That said, Susman Godfrey has never spent a huge amount of time on firm management. Serving as managing partner really won't affect my own litigation practice.

**LD:** How has it been since you officially took over as managing partner? What's the biggest adjustment for you?

**NM:** Actually, there hasn't been much of an adjustment. I recognize that my partners are essentially unmanage-

able, because we have a very democratic system in which every lawyer has an equal vote on almost all issues of firm governance, and anything "decided" by the managing partners can be reconsidered at our weekly meeting of all our lawyers. Recognizing this helps me avoid most of the frustrations one could have as managing partner. We've also got guys named Godfrey and Susman who are also still managing partners and very much involved in running the firm.

**LD:** What skills as a litigator do you think serve you well in your current position?

**NM:** Good trial lawyers are problem solvers. They are able to identify what is important and what is unimportant. They focus on the end-game. They are persuasive advocates. I use each of those skills in my trial practice, and I use each of them to some extent as managing partner.

**LD:** Tell us about business development or marketing plans that Susman Godfrey is planning to undertake, or is currently undertaking, in your first year at the helm. Are you planning to just stay the course or go color outside the lines?

**NM:** For our entire 32 years as a firm, our very best method of business development and marketing has been to win cases. That's still the plan. The headline on our website says it all: "Susman Godfrey: The Way To Win." We've targeted some new types of cases, and offered even more attractive alternative fee arrangements to clients. But the bottom line remains the same: Win. We also have undertaken a major initiative to increase the number of female and minority lawyers (including partners) at our firm. We're already seeing progress. By the end of the year, 50% of the lawyers in our Los Angeles office will be women.

**LD:** With all the doom-and-gloom about firms' prospects these days, what makes you optimistic about the future of your own firm and the market in general?

**NM:** Our firm always has been extremely nimble in adapting to changing market conditions, and in offering clients the financial benefits of our efficiency and skill. We're trial lawyers who can try any type of case, anywhere. That's what we do, and that's all we do. By consistently winning verdicts or big settlements in major cases, we have developed a very strong and resilient brand. Consequently, our firm has done extremely well even during the last years of instability in the legal profession.

See the full Q&A at [www.lawdragon.com/lawyer-lights/neal-manne](http://www.lawdragon.com/lawyer-lights/neal-manne).