

NYLJ's 2025 Attorney of the Year: Bill Carmody of Susman Godfrey

By Emily Saul

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To Bill Carmody, everyone is a potential juror. The cab driver, a guest at a dinner party, someone he meets on his travels.

He loves talking to people, any people. In part, because he truly loves people, but also because any one person, in a spontaneous conversation, could one day help him relate to a jury.

"I want to learn from everyone," the Susman Godfrey partner and head of the New York office said. "Listening to people, learning what they think and why they think it...because these are all people that one day, either the same person or people just like them, that I'm going to be charged to persuade."

Conversely, people love talking to Carmody. Also working with Carmody, or simply being near Carmody. Colleague after colleague described a joyfully zealous approach to all aspects of life, be it meticulously planning a cross examination he may scrap at the last second, or appreciating food, wine, art and architecture.

Jurors also love Carmody.

"I do think he connects extraordinarily well with jurors," said legendary lawyer David Boies, with whom Carmody is currently on trial.



Photo: Ryland West

Bill Carmody of Susman Godfrey

Boies, chairperson and founding partner of Boies Schiller Flexner, attributes that ability to Carmody's authenticity and his fastidious preparation, which helps preserve his reputation with jurors.

"Part of his strength with a jury is the fact he doesn't make mistakes, he doesn't get his credibility undermined," Boies said. "And that, combined with his ability to connect with the jury, is very powerful."

Shawn Rabin, a Susman Godfrey partner and friend, recalled after one "very boring" trial that two jurors approached the legal team simply because they were eager to say hello to Carmody.

"It was incredible," Rabin recalled. "The jurors just wanted to, like, meet this guy that was kind

of larger than life and managed to have this connection with them.”

Carmody tried three of the biggest cases in the United States in 2024. He spoke to the New York Law Journal during yet another—the massive, \$29 billion privacy action against Google on behalf of nearly 100 million Google users. Carmody is co-chairing the Google case with Boies.

Six Days Notice

Carmody describes his current practice as “the art of coming in late.” At 67-year-old, he now parachutes into cases just before trial, be that a couple months or even weeks beforehand.

About 20 years ago, he had six days notice. And he still won the case, with the jury returning a defense verdict in maybe 30, 45 minutes, he recalled.

“It taught me, you know, really more than anything else, that what I do now is doable,” he said. “When one is a real trial lawyer, you realize that 90% of what happens before trial doesn’t affect the outcome of the trial.”

As for his process, Carmody says he creates a war room in his home, and then holes up in a hotel room by himself on location. He’ll later be joined by colleagues, but he first ingests the case alone and determines what the jury will care about. Which is not much, he maintained.

“You want to quickly figure out what the truth is, and once you understand what really happened, you can identify the couple of issues that are going to really matter,” he explained. “Figure out those things that will really move the needle with the jury, versus thinking about all the different things, exhibits, all the shit that happened during years and years and years of litigation.”

“Getting wrapped up like a pretzel,” he said, means lawyers “can’t see the forest for the trees.”

Shawn Raymond, a partner at Susman Godfrey, likened Carmody to a portrait artist who creates a magnificent larger image that, when the observer looks closely, is perfectly executed down to the tiniest stroke.

“Bill is very much about the big picture, the end game,” Raymond said. “And boy, there is no small detail when he’s getting involved in a case that is going to be overlooked.”

Carmody’s energy is “infectious,” Rabin explained.

“I don’t want Bill to be more prepared than me, so then I want to become the most prepared lawyer in the courtroom,” he said. “And so, this intensity...spreads across everyone, the most senior partners to the most junior paralegals on the case.”

“He always looks out for everybody and makes [trial] an enjoyable experience, which can be very unique in today’s world,” Rabin added.

Outside the courtroom, he coordinates ebullient dinners for the trial team.

Carmody told the Law Journal he likes to “work hard and play hard.” He loves food, wine, and having a good time.

Carmody also drives hard. Rabin recalls one of their first encounters, around 2001, vividly. He and his now-wife flew to Dallas to have dinner with Carmody. Carmody, Rabin recalled, drove easily over 100 miles an hour on a new toll road, with the silently terrified passengers white knuckling it in the back seat.

Humble beginnings

Born in New York at what was then the New York Foundling hospital, Carmody was raised in Levittown on Long Island. He is adopted, as are his siblings, a sister and a late brother.

The lawyer describes his beginning as “humble.” His life is very different now, he said, at that point

speaking from one of his two homes, this one in the Hamptons. He and his wife, Catherine—once a lawyer and now a screenwriter—spend the winter in Miami Beach.

“Everything Bill has, he has achieved because of his hustle and hard work,” Rabin said. “I think one of the reasons he drives himself so much is because he knows that everything in life he’s had to earn, and he is willing to work harder than everybody else to get it.”

Carmody went to college in at Kings Point—a federal U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, like West Point. After graduation he worked on oil tankers, bringing oil from one refinery to another up and down the coast from Boston to Texas.

He was laid off, and had a ship drop him in Fort Lauderdale. At that point, he says, he knew he wanted to be a lawyer or an architect, but not yet. He stayed in Miami, slinging drinks at bars and nightclubs.

One of those places, Mutiny, was a legendary private club, the crown jewel of Miami nightlife in the 1970s and 1980s. It was frequented by musicians and drug lords, and inspiration for the movie “Scarface.”

“Cocaine central,” Carmody said. “It was just a wilder, different life to be in Miami.”

“I can either go one way or the other,” Carmody said he realized at the time. “I better take the right path here and get myself to law school better late than never.”

Carmody then followed a girl to Oklahoma. They stopped seeing one another but he stayed in Tulsa, he said, and “got rid of the chip on my shoulder.”

While attending University of Tulsa College of Law, he helped put together another “hot bar, nightclub-place” in Tulsa, the Sunset Grill (now closed).

In the late 1980s after he graduated, Carmody went to work at what was Fulbright & Jaworski, now Norton Rose Fulbright in Texas.

He and another associate, Tim Robinson, broke away and formed Robinson Carmody. Carmody then went out on his own, focusing on business litigation, which is how he met Stephen Susman, founding and name partner of Susman Godfrey.

Carmody has now been there 25 years.

While at Susman, Carmody has secured one of the largest antitrust verdicts in U.S. history, at \$4.7 billion. He won more than \$700 million for the city of Baltimore, holding opioid manufacturers and distributors accountable. He defended Uber in the legal battle between the transportation company and Google/Waymo. He represented WeWork co-founder, Adam Neumann, in litigation with SoftBank. He won \$61 million on behalf of a client fighting Chevron. He has become a go-to lawyer for hedge fund managers and some of the top companies in the U.S.

In addition to big wins, he’s extraordinarily creative, his colleagues said.

One example: decades ago, Carmody was representing a client in a case that was supposed to go to trial, but he found out his case was not first on the calendar the following Monday. He wanted to go first, so, over the weekend, his client approached the parties in that other matter. The client asked the parties how much they wanted to settle their case, and then cut them checks.

On Monday, Carmody’s opposing counsel was blindsided when their case was called first. The lawyer felt forced to announce ready, but had not prepared for their expert, and Carmody won.

If he wasn’t a litigator, Carmody said he thinks he’d make movies. He wasn’t aware making

movies was a profession when he was younger, he explained.

But he said great lawyering is like making great movies. For example, Clint Eastwood – a “good-to-fair actor” and an “Oscar-winning director.”

Some directors, Carmody said, will do dozens of takes of a movie scene. But Eastwood, or “someone like a Steve Susman,” gets in, nails it, and moves on.

Those unused takes, not unlike pretrial discovery, never see the light of day, he said. He’s not saying that pre-trial discovery is not important or essential, just that some people get bogged down in the minutia.

“To me, it’s like so many people are focused on the wrong issues and points that are just too, too nuanced,” he said.

Asked what motivates him, Carmody said the fear of losing.

“We’re all competitive at the level I’m at right now,” he said. “And I’m obviously a fiduciary to the client and I just want to make sure I’ve given it my best.”

Asked about regrets, Carmody quoted Frank Sinatra’s “My Way,” lilting: “Regrets, I’ve had a few...But then again, too few to mention.”

“I never look back,” he added. “Once I’m done with something, I’m done, and I’m looking to the next thing. I’m a natural optimist.”

Wooing a jury

Renowned late trial lawyer Gerry Spence was a mentor, Carmody said, and taught him the “power of being authentic.”

Being vulnerable invites other people to be vulnerable, which forms a kind of bond, he explained.

“Being in the courtroom, I’m just being me, not some stylized version of me or someone I’m not,” Carmody said. “It’s a way to really connect and

talk to people, in a way they realize is real, you’re a real person.”

Rabin said he once saw Carmody decide in the moment not to do an intensely prepared cross examination because they were nearing the end of a long trial day. Instead, Carmody cut off the cross and asked that court be adjourned.

“Bill already had a sense we had won over the jury at that point,” Rabin said. “It almost made it seem like he was doing the jury a favor and letting them go home that day. Just that simple act of not focusing on the cross, but focusing on what the jury wanted, I think, gained him so much credibility with the jury.”

Asked what makes Carmody so magical with jurors, colleagues also cited the power of being authentic.

“Bill has a really unique ability to relate to anybody,” Raymond said. “You’re talking about one of the most successful business people, most successful trial lawyers. But this is a guy that you can take in a diner, you can take in a factory, you can take wherever, and he’s going to fit in, and it’s due to his authenticity.”

A related piece of that, Raymond said, is Carmody’s ability to make people feel special. The first case Raymond worked with Carmody, Raymond said Carmody asked him to come to Dallas.

Raymond remembered that Carmody put him up in an apartment, and with his wife, Catherine, organized a “once in a lifetime day” for Raymond. The trio went to the Texas Motor Speedway, where they sat in VIP seats. Carmody had procured “custom-made VIP earphone covers” for the occasion. And then they went to lunch at a celebrated, hard-to-get-into restaurant where Carmody was able to get a table “because, of course, it’s Bill.”

"I think one thing that is very true to Bill is that when you're with Bill, Bill is not the focus," Raymond said. "Bill is just focusing on you, and you feel like you end up mattering. I think that that's just one of the unique ways that he connects with people."

Jacob Buchdahl, a partner at Susman Godfrey, said Carmody was like "a fish in water" in front of jurors.

"I think Bill loves people," Buchdahl said. "He loves them for everything that they are, and their differences. He loves getting to know people, loves understanding what makes them tick. And he loves thinking about what will appeal to different kinds of people. I think that that kind of real affection for humanity is what he draws on to connect to them."

"I think it's hard to be a great jury lawyer if you don't like people," he added.

Dinosaurs

As for the future of trial lawyering, Carmody doesn't think it's dead—it just might look different.

"I've heard people say, you know, 'You guys are dinosaurs,' and 'It's going to be the end of an era,'" he said. "And that may be true, but it's hard for me to believe that there's not going to be some other era, because life goes on."

What will always matter, Carmody said, is being a good communicator who can distill complex concepts. Someone who can take technical, complicated ideas and translate them for a typical layperson.

"I think there's going to be a new type of communication," he said, citing a generation of people glued to their phones and communicating digitally.

"When I grew up, we were talking to one another, we weren't texting under the table," Carmody noted. "But if that's the way people are communicating in our life, maybe lawyers who grew up that way present cases differently, but in a way that can effectively communicate with the jurors, you know, because it'll be a different type of jurors."

Carmody he's learned how to communicate with people from many walks of life by talking to them, asking them to teach him about themselves and their worldview.

"A lot of people can tell their own story, but they can't tell another person's story," he said. "As a trial lawyer, I'm always telling someone else's story."

Carmody is an archetype of the trial lawyer, Boies said.

"Bill is a lawyer that grew up in a time when lawyers really liked what they did," he said. "They were very collegial – you fight hard in court, but you go have a drink afterwards."

For attorneys like Carmody, Boies said: "Your word is your bond. You fight very hard for your client, but you do so within the bounds of realism and civility. And you recognize that you and your opponent are both performing roles in our justice system, and you respect that."

"We've gotten away from some of those principles," Boies observed.