

Steven A. Lessne

Shareholder

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561-961-8085



Practice & Industry Areas

- Business Litigation
- Private Wealth Services
- Probate, Trust & Guardianship Litigation
- Corporate Law
- Labor & Employment Law
- Dispute Resolution

Education

- University of Florida Levin College of Law, J.D., 1996
- Indiana University, B.A., 1991

Bar & Court Admissions

- Florida Bar
- United States Court of Appeals
 - Eleventh Circuit
- United States District Court
 - Southern District of Florida
 - Middle District of Florida

Overview

Steven Lessne joined Gunster as a shareholder in 2015.

Steven advises private wealth and business clients on a variety of issues, from day-to-day operations and decisions to complex transactions and disputes. Steven maintains personal, long-term relationships with his clients, serving them loyally as their trusted advisor and legal point of contact, and zealously as their advocate, whether in negotiations, dispute resolution or litigation.

With a family business background and nearly twenty years of experience as a complex litigator (primarily handling matters involving business, estates, trusts, real estate and banking), Steven has seen the multitude of ways in which transactions, operations and fiduciary administrations can go wrong. His primary mission is to help his clients avoid litigation and other pitfalls by reviewing their documents from a litigator's standpoint,

identifying potential issues, working with clients and their transactional lawyers and other professionals when necessary, overseeing legal work and billings, and being accessible to address day-to-day questions and issues as they arise.

In his litigation and dispute resolution practice, Steven has substantial experience in estate/trust, business, real estate and banking litigation. In his fiduciary practice, this broad experience enables him to resolve disputes and design solutions for complex estates and trusts, particularly those with business holdings and considerations. In his commercial practice, Steven represent banks, companies and individuals in disputes concerning banking and finance, mergers, business torts, shareholder/partner relations, contracts, real estate, landlord/tenant relations, fraud and restrictive covenants.

Steven's legal experience is bolstered by his practical business experience, his resolution-style approach, his ability to calmly and effectively manage crisis situations, and his desire to help his clients succeed. As a counselor and advocate, Steven aims to help his clients identify and achieve their objectives, whether in business or in court.

Representative Matters

- Represented the court appointed successor personal representative of the estate of a prominent real estate developer. Investigated transactions between dozens of related entities and individuals, and pursued millions of dollars from related parties and prior fiduciaries. Obtained partial summary judgment for over \$9 million in debt by successfully arguing for the adoption of two new principles of Florida law.
- Represented the insured under a STOLI (stranger originated life insurance) policy. In the first of its kind case, the insured sought a declaratory judgment that the policy was void ab initio for lack of an insurable interest because he bought the policy with the intent to sell it. Recouped over \$5 million of premiums from the insurer and premium finance company in a settlement.
- Represented a religious institution in a dispute with national charities over a multi-million dollar bequest left to another, since dissolved religious institution. Argued to a foreign court that, as a matter of first impression, the "de facto merger" doctrine could be used to establish that the client was the successor to the dissolved financial institution (the doctrine had not been applied in this context before). After defeating motions for summary judgment, Steven obtained a multi-million dollar settlement for the client.
- Represented an out-of-state Insurance Commissioner, in her capacity as the liquidator of an out-of-state insurance company, in an action to set aside preferential payments made to a Florida insurance company.
- Represented the court appointed receiver for a failing Miami hotel. Worked with government officials to remediate fire code violations, cure tax deficiencies and preserve the hotel's liquor license for the benefit of creditors.

- Represented, through two arbitration proceedings and two judicial proceedings, an acquiring bank in a dispute with another bank arising out of their merger.
- Represented a physician separating from his medical group. Obtained a release from a covenant not to compete and a favorable protocol regarding the release of patient records.
- Represented the buyer of a commercial office building in an action for fraud against the seller. After two jury trials and an appeal, obtained a significant judgement, and secured the post-judgment appointment of a receiver to take over the debtors' companies and recover monies transferred overseas to India.
- On multiple occasions, litigated actions to set aside and recover fraudulent conveyances.
- Supervised a volume practice of escalated, contested foreclosure matters for a large, national financial institution.
- Current and longstanding representation of a large South Florida shopping mall in various matters.

Honors

- *The Best Lawyers in America*®, Trusts and Estates Litigation, 2018-21
- AV Preeminent rating as independently determined by Martindale-Hubbell
- Florida *Super Lawyers*, 2013-20
- Florida *Super Lawyers*, "Rising Star," 2009-11
- Florida *Trend*, "Legal Elite," 2008-09, 2012
- Recipient of the Bar/Bri Award, 1997

Professional Associations & Memberships

- Florida Bar
 - Real Property, Probate and Trust Law Section
 - Probate and Trust Litigation Committee
 - Trust Law Committee
 - Probate Law and Procedure Committee
 - Business Law Section
 - Business Litigation Committee
- American Bar Association
 - Real Property, Trust and Estate Law Section
 - Litigation, Ethics and Malpractice Group, Probate and Fiduciary Litigation

Civic & Community Service

- Florida Democratic Lawyers Council

- Regional lead counsel for eight Florida counties, 2012
- Lead county counsel for Palm Beach County, 2006, 2008, 2010
- Keiser University, Advisory Board, 2012-present
- Jewish Federation of South Palm Beach County, Professional Advisory Committee, 2008-present
- Anti-Defamation League
 - Regional board member, 2017-18
 - Glass Leadership Institute, 2015-present
- Leadership Broward Foundation, board of directors, 2012
- Leadership Broward Class XXX, class representative and project chair, 2011
- Congregation Shaarei Kodesh of Boca Raton, synagogue counsel, 2008-present