

TOP ATTORNEYS

CRISTINE ARGUEDAS Behind the Scenes

Cris Arguedas' office is nice, sure, but it's not what it could be for someone with her reputation.

Located in a converted auto shop in Emeryville, squeezed between a laboratory and a production company, the office has been the first stop for those movers and shakers from the business world who woke up one day and found the FBI at their door.

Timothy Belden came. He's the Enron power trader accused of gaming the California energy market and is regarded as the linchpin to a widening scandal. Former McKesson Corp. exec Jay Gilbertson also came — he's also cooperating with the government. So have several prominent unindicted executives, who saw Arguedas make their problems go away with nary a whisper in the press.

"Some of the cases that I'm most proud of are the ones that didn't get charged," says Arguedas, of Arguedas, Cassman & Headley.

Of course, convincing the government that it doesn't have a case takes a proven ability to win trials. And Arguedas has done that.

Time Magazine called her one of the best trial lawyers in America in 1983 — when Arguedas was four years out of Rutgers School of Law. Soon after, Arguedas was trying the Wedtech case, a scandal that embroiled the Reagan administration. She has notched several white-collar trial victories in her career.

Arguedas is praised by judges and her opponents. One jurist commended her for coming into court with "solutions, rather than problems." A prosecutor said Arguedas deserves praise for recognizing early where she wants a case to end up, and then setting out to get there — without first burning through her client's retainer.

Arguedas, 50, says some lawyers charge into cases blindly, which is a mistake. "They gear up to litigate it without having a strategy in mind, without having an endpoint."



SHELLEY EADES

Another key is being honest with a client.

"A lot of big-firm lawyers are afraid to lose a client, and so they don't have that 'come to Jesus' conversation that they need to have. And I'm not," Arguedas says.

— Jason Hoppin

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