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## August 2008 WSGR Alumni Spotlight, Gali Schaham Gordon

### Immigration Attorney and Principal, Law Office of Gali Schaham Gordon

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At first glance, many of attorney Gali Schaham Gordon's clients would seem to have little in common—they run the gamut from highly skilled engineers with Ph.D.s to undocumented busboys who cannot afford to pay her. But all share one thing: a deep desire to live and work in this country.

Gali, who worked as a corporate associate at Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati from 1999 to 2002, runs her own San Francisco-based law office that includes one other attorney. Besides the aforementioned engineers and busboys, she represents entrepreneurs, tech workers, academics, artists, and a smattering of manual laborers. "My clients come from a wide variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels, and I enjoy them all," says Gali. Since immigration law usually entails dual representation when petitioning the government for work visas, she represents both employees and employers at companies large and small.



Straight from Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati, Gali hung up her shingle in 2003, not so long after September 11th, a time when immigration law was becoming increasingly strict. "It makes things difficult for my clients, especially for those who are Muslim or who come from Middle Eastern countries," Gali says. In one case, an engineer from Iran who held a Ph.D. from an American university waited two and a half years for his green card. Another client, a scientist from Pakistan employed by a biomedical company, has been waiting for almost two years so far. Gali shakes her head at such delays and believes that the U.S. loses talent to Europe and elsewhere because of its restrictive policies. "The greatest misconception in America is that immigrants are a drain on our economy," Gali says. "Study after study disproves that, including a recent one by Duke University showing that 25 percent of technology companies in the U.S. were founded by immigrants. They contribute far more than they take from this nation in a variety of ways."

Gali feels a special empathy for newcomers to this country in part because she is an immigrant herself. When she was six years old, her family moved from Israel to the U.S. after her father was hired as an engineer by an American company. "The process he went through to get his green card is the same process I use to help my clients," Gali explains. In addition to her personal experience as an immigrant, her knowledge of other languages—including Spanish, Portuguese, Hebrew, Japanese, and French—also serves her well as an immigration attorney.

Gali says that her experience as a young associate at Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati also helped prepare her for her chosen field of law. "In contrast to my first job at a large firm, which amounted to being locked up in a room reviewing documents, my experience at Wilson included a lot of hands-on work with start-up companies," she says. "I had many clients who needed a lot of hand-holding, and I was able to run my own small deals right from the beginning." The young lawyer found herself doing everything from helping set up stock-option plans to negotiating with venture capitalists to providing basic assistance with employment matters. "It was kind of like having a mini general practice under a corporate umbrella."

Gali credits firm partner Steve Bochner for giving her the opportunity to dive into the corporate work

right away. "Steve had enough faith and confidence in me to let me hit the ground running," Gali says. He also served as an important role model, demonstrating the importance of being a good listener. "Steve really listens to clients and gets a good sense of their needs," she says. "That skill is really important in every field of law."

With this background, it's not surprising that Gali finds working with entrepreneurs particularly rewarding. "I really get entrepreneurs," she says. "I like them and respect them." In one case, Gali assisted three immigrants from Mexico who had just graduated from a Bay Area business school and wanted to stay in the U.S. to start a hedge fund. She also represented Italian immigrants who founded a home-remodeling business in the Bay Area and wanted to expand their company's operations to China.

While at Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati, Gali did pro bono work with immigrants, a tradition that began during her law-school days. Most recently, Gali has been volunteering with other attorneys to represent undocumented workers taken into custody during immigration raids at Mexican restaurants in the Bay Area. Though there are few avenues of relief available to most of those workers, Gali is hopeful she will be able to help one man who is responsible for supporting his severely disabled son, a U.S. citizen.

Gali, who is sensitive to the fact that immigration enforcement can sometimes separate children from parents, is all the more grateful for the time she is able to spend with her own family, which includes husband Josh Gordon, and daughters, Arielle, 6, and Carin, 4. Gali and Josh, an attorney with Morrison & Foerster, appreciate the time they can spend relaxing in their hometown of Pacifica, often mountain biking along the coastal trails. Practicing yoga also provides a nice counterpoint to Gali's work life, which she admits can be intense and draining. "But I take great pride in it because it's truly meaningful," Gali says. "I really believe in what I'm doing."

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