

Managing partner of San Diego firm believes in a faith-based approach

By Brian Cox

Discipline. Focus. Trust. Faith.

Michael Pérez attributes his success as a lawyer to key core values around which he has built not only his career and law firm, but also his life.

The San Diego trial attorney, who has amassed more than 80 civil and criminal jury trials without a loss over the course of three decades, credits his lifelong passion for sports, in general, and wrestling, specifically, with instilling in him an appreciation for hard work and preparation.



To celebrate earning his doctorate degree in theology from Notre Dame, Michael Pérez traveled to Lourdes, France, in July 2025 with his wife, Beckie, and their son, Ezekiel.



“There’s a phrase we use as a coach: On game day everybody wants to be a champion,” says Pérez, who was a Division I wrestler at Stanford University and now coaches a high school team. “On game day, everybody wants to be the winner. Everybody wants to be the hero. But all of that requires immense amounts of work. You don’t get up and win a batting title because you show up on game day. You do it because of the hours you spend in the batting cages.”

That is what lawyering is, he says, even if clients can’t always appreciate the work that goes on “behind the curtain.”

“I always tell people, I win trials not because I’m a great lawyer in front of a jury,” says Pérez. “It’s because of all the stuff that we do before we get to a jury.”

It’s all of the hard work, he says. It’s doing the right things. It’s putting in the effort. It’s having a plan, sticking to the plan, and working the plan. It’s knowing what’s worth fighting about and what’s not worth fighting about. It’s making sure that your skills stay sharp. All those things, he says, are what go into showing up in front of a jury and winning on game day.

Pérez is the managing partner of Pérez Vaughn & Feasby, a San Diego-based boutique business litigation firm acclaimed for its efficiency, strategic agility, and uncompromising commitment to quality. Founded in 2005 by Pérez and three colleagues from a large national firm, the practice was built to be “smart, aggressive, nimble, and efficient.”

Pérez’s commitment to those qualities was born out of hard-earned experience with the demands of Big Law.

After earning his law degree from University of California, Los Angeles School of Law, Pérez began his career at Brobeck, Phleger & Harrison, a large San Francisco-based law firm. In the four years Pérez spent there, he learned that the big firm formula for success was antithetical to maintaining a balance of what was important in his life.

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Michael with his brother, Jon, his father, Ralph, and his wife, Beckie.

“From a very early stage in my career, it became apparent to me that those formulas – increasing hours, increasing rates, all of the marble, all of the glitter of big law firms – were the very things that made it nearly impossible to live a life that was not driven solely by money, solely by profit and loss statements,” reflects Pérez.

In 1994, Pérez turned down a partnership offer to instead become a public servant. He left Brobeck, Phleger & Harrison to serve as an Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Southern District of California. Over his three years in the position, Pérez conducted numerous grand jury investigations and indictments, drug trafficking trials, and other prosecutions of federal crimes, as well as related appeals in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. He then spent three years as the General Counsel at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City before serving as counselor to Deputy U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder for nearly two years.

In 2001, Pérez returned to the private sector, joining Luce, Hamilton, Forward & Scripps, one of the largest law firms in the western U.S. in terms of revenue and the largest firm in California based on its number of attorneys. He quickly rose through the ranks and handled major cases for clients such as Sony and San Diego Gas & Electric. But he discovered that the Big Law formula had not changed during his absence.

“It’s the way Big Law is set up,” explains Pérez. “You have to bill certain hours, you have to meet certain quotas, you have to hit certain numbers, and if you don’t, the firm doesn’t make money, the business doesn’t make money, and that impacts everything. That’s not the life I wanted to live. I wanted to spend time with my family.”

While the firm was anxious to keep Pérez and offered him incentives to stay, having a different title on his door was not his goal. So, in 2005, he decided to get off the Big Law treadmill, with the idea of founding a law firm built on the principles of efficiency, effectiveness, and expertise, which would ultimately allow its attorneys to have greater flexibility in their lives.

“We’re here to be really good at what we do,” says Pérez. “Clients value communication, trust, and relationships – we lean into those things. For my business to thrive, it’s not because I’m going to represent you on a single matter. It’s going to be because I’m going to represent you on numerous items, and the only way that happens is if I do a really good job for you.”

The firm achieves that objective in part by not straying far from its areas of expertise. It also prides itself on being nimble.

“We have no hard and fast rules,” says Pérez. “We can change. If you want to do a hybrid rate, we can do that. If you want a discount rate, we could do that. We don’t have a bunch of committees or meetings.”

Equally important, Pérez adds, is cost-effectiveness.

As a smaller firm, Pérez Vaughn & Feasby doesn’t have the overhead, “nickel-and-diming” or “sticker shock” of a larger firm. In addition, there is no billable-hour requirement. That means



Michael had the privilege of reading at Mass during his trip to Lourdes, France.

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Michael and his three sons: (l-r) Tony, Michael, and Ezekiel attending Tony's wedding in June 2025.

its lawyers aren't pressured to inflate their hours, and clients aren't paying for inefficiencies or the steep learning curve of new associates. The firm keeps its operations lean.

"I know from numerous matters where we have prevailed and we seek attorneys' fees, we get to see what we've billed versus what the other side has billed, and time and again, courts have told us how incredibly reasonable our fees are," says Pérez.

The model also allows for something that many lawyers in big firms struggle to find: balance.

"If we can drive down the cost factors, then not only does that allow us to pass on savings to our clients, but it allows us to do other things, whether it's spending time with family, whether it's community service, whether it's hobbies," says Pérez. "It gives us the ability to have a work-life balance because we don't have the billable hour requirement."

That flexibility, he believes, makes for better lawyers and better people.

For Pérez, faith, has a great deal to do with that balance.

A lifelong Catholic, he recently completed a master's degree in theology from the University of Notre Dame, where he defended a thesis on sin, redemption, and ecumenism. The project, he explains, was born from a desire to bridge misunderstandings among Christian denominations and to promote unity through shared understanding.

When Pérez was a first-year lawyer at Brobeck, the firm created a marketing piece about all the new associates. Pérez's profile featured a quote from St. Augustine: "Pray as if everything depends on God, work as if everything depends on you."

He remembers younger colleagues finding the quote laughable.

"I never understood why faith is such a hard thing to hold at the same time as you're holding a career in law," he says. "And since then, I've come to know a lot of people who do hold those two things side by side, but I saw very little of it in the big firm life."

Pérez is committed to representing his faith through action. Together with his wife, Beckie, he co-founded Imago Dei Ministries, a nonprofit that operates the 29:Eleven Maternity Home, which provides housing and support for women in unplanned pregnancies.

"Faith isn't just something you profess – it's something you live," Pérez says. "If you're going to tell your kids that family, service, and compassion matter, they have to see you living that way."

That same conviction shapes the way he mentors younger attorneys and builds firm culture.

"If you want to talk about work-life balance, it has to start with leadership," he says. "I can talk all I want about the firm valuing spending time with your family, but if I say you've got to bill 2,000 hours, then it's just not possible. The business model and the values have to align."

For Pérez, the lessons of faith and law often intersect with those he learned on the wrestling mat. He's been coaching for nearly 30 years – first at Valhalla High School, now at St. Augustine High School, where he leads the wrestling program and holds regular "faith talks" with his athletes.

"For me, I think coaching is ministry. You take young men who are still trying to figure out what they believe. They're about to go out into the world. My goal in these faith talks is not to tell them what they believe, it's just to get them to start thinking it through for themselves," he explains. He also encourages the parents of the athletes to join in these conversations.

He credits his own wrestling coach at Stanford, the late Olympic gold medalist Dave Schultz, with teaching him that faith and professionalism could coexist.

"Dave became a great source of inspiration for me, both because of how good he was at the sport, how he went about his job, and because he introduced faith into the equation," says Pérez.

As a seven-time World and Olympic medalist, Schultz was a legend and icon in the wrestling world. Pérez admired his coach's ability and willingness to draw people in for conversations about faith.

"To have somebody like Dave have conversations with you about faith suddenly made it something that was not only

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acceptable, but something that you could really bond over with him and others on the team,” says Pérez.

Twenty years after its founding, the business litigation firm of Pérez Vaughn & Feasby has successfully embodied the values and principles closest to Pérez’s heart. The firm specializes in trial work and dispute resolution across a significant span of industries, including financial services, energy and utilities, technology, biotechnology, real estate, and entertainment. It represents a wide range of regional, national, and international companies.

Pérez’s goal was clear from the beginning: Build a law practice where excellence and integrity come before everything else. That began with a few core values that continue to define the firm today.

“I like to think in 35 years of practicing law, that I’ve been pretty faithful in those efforts, which hopefully makes me a very good lawyer on behalf of my clients,” he says.

Looking back, he sees his career has been defined not by titles or verdicts, but by faithfulness – to clients, to family, and to the principles that shape his life.



While participating in the Mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in Manhattan, Michael had the opportunity to meet Fr. Enrique Salvo, the cathedral’s current rector. Michael’s wife, Beckie, and his sons Michael and Ezekiel assisted in bringing up the gifts, a symbolic act where parishioners carry bread, wine, and the money collection to the altar.