

# Heaven Desai

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## SUMMARY

Employment counsel with eight years of progressive experience advising technology, financial services, payments, and regulated business clients on workforce matters across the employee lifecycle. Advises People leaders and executives on hiring, employment agreements, performance management, accommodations, leaves, **wage and hour compliance**, separations, compensation, benefits, equity, and conduct concerns. Leads sensitive workplace investigations from intake through findings and resolution, while managing agency charges, disputes, outside counsel, litigation strategy, and legal spend. Coordinates employment advice across the Americas, APAC, and EMEA, including contractor classification, **employer of record** arrangements, **cross border remote work**, mobility exposure, and **permanent establishment risk**. Converts complex legal analysis into concise guidance, practical playbooks, and consistent decisions for distributed teams.

## EXPERIENCE

### Senior Employment Counsel

July 2023 - Present

Meridian Payworks

*Chicago, IL*

Leads U.S. employment counseling for a regulated payments platform, partnering with People leaders, executives, compensation teams, and global counsel on sensitive workforce decisions and scalable legal operations.

- Advised **People leaders** on hiring agreements, performance, **accommodations**, leaves, wage compliance, and separations.
- Directed retaliation investigations through interviews, evidence review, findings, and resolution recommendations for executives.
- Built investigation, accommodation, performance, and separation playbooks for consistent People team decisions.
- Coordinated Canada, United Kingdom, Singapore, and Australia advice on classification, EOR, remote work, and mobility.
- Managed **agency charges** and threatened claims through strategy, budgets, **outside counsel**, and disciplined legal spend.
- Counseled **compensation** teams on incentive plans, equity communications, benefits, and **remuneration** questions in regulated units.

### Employment Counsel

June 2020 - June 2023

Harborline Financial Technologies

*Milwaukee, WI*

Served as primary employment law partner for People operations at a growing financial software organization, translating workforce risk into practical guidance during expansion and restructuring.

- Led harassment, discrimination, conflict, and **conduct** investigations, producing factual records and remediation recommendations.
- Reworked employment **templates** and national policies around evolving state and federal requirements.
- Managed agency matters and pre **litigation** disputes through preservation, factual development, and executive updates.
- Evaluated worker classification and cross border engagement questions for remote personnel and contractors.
- Counseled People operations on **leaves**, accommodations, wage compliance, performance, termination, **benefits**, and compensation.
- Converted complex employment analysis into concise guidance for distributed business and People stakeholders.

### Employment Associate

October 2018 - May 2020

Barton, Hale & Pierce LLP

*Chicago, IL*

Counseled corporate clients through employment decisions, investigations, agency matters, and multistate policy work, consolidating legal analysis for distributed workforces.

- Counseled clients on **hiring**, discipline, performance, leave, **accommodations**, and termination decisions.
- Conducted **workplace investigations** through interview planning, credibility assessments, factual summaries, and recommended next steps.
- Defended employers in **agency charges** through strategy, position statements, discovery, and negotiation preparation.
- Reviewed handbooks, policies, agreements, and separation documents for federal and multistate compliance.
- Researched wage, restrictive covenant, classification, and leave issues for executive guidance.
- Coordinated local counsel across jurisdictions and consolidated advice for clients with distributed workforces.

### Junior Employment Associate

September 2017 - September 2018

Caldwell & Rowe LLP

*Chicago, IL*

Supported senior attorneys on employment counseling and litigation for technology, professional services, and financial services clients, building a strong foundation in investigations and compliance.

- Prepared guidance on wage, leave, accommodation, discrimination, and discipline issues under attorney supervision.
- Built factual chronologies and document collections for investigations, agency responses, and **employment disputes**.
- Drafted handbook provisions, **employment agreements**, separation documents, and manager guidance.
- Supported discovery and case preparation through document review and witness preparation materials.
- Monitored multistate employment law developments for counseling and policy updates.
- Supported technology and financial services clients during sensitive employment decisions and litigation preparation.

PROJECTS

Global Workforce Legal Playbook 📅 2025

Created a practical framework for contractor classification, employer of record arrangements, cross border remote work, mobility exposure, and permanent establishment review across global regions.

Workplace Investigation Framework 📅 2024

Built an intake through resolution framework for sensitive workplace investigations, giving People partners clearer documentation, escalation, interview, findings, and resolution guidance.

LEADERSHIP & AWARDS

- Recognized by People leadership for practical guidance during sensitive employee relations matters.
- Selected by business executives as a trusted advisor for regulated workforce decisions.

EDUCATION

Juris Doctor

Loyola University Chicago School of Law GPA: 0

2017  
Chicago, IL

**Coursework:** Employment Law, Labor Law, Civil Procedure, Professional Responsibility

Bachelor of Arts in Political Science

University of Wisconsin Madison GPA: 0

2014  
Madison, WI

**Coursework:** Constitutional Law, Public Policy, Administrative Law, Legal Institutions

CERTIFICATIONS

- Illinois State Bar, Active 📅 2017
- Association of Workplace Investigators Certificate Holder 📅 2022

TECHNICAL SKILLS

- **Employment Law:** Employee relations, employment agreements, wage and hour compliance
- **Workplace Investigations:** Intake planning, witness interviews, evidence assessment
- **Dispute Management:** Agency charges, pre litigation disputes, litigation strategy
- **Global Workforce:** Contractor classification, employer of record, cross border work
- **People Operations:** Performance management, accommodations, leaves
- **Compensation Programs:** Benefits, equity, incentive plans
- **Policy Development:** Handbooks, manager guidance, legal playbooks
- **Outside Counsel:** Counsel strategy, budget review, legal spend
- **Legal Research:** Federal law, state law, multistate compliance
- **Investigation Documentation:** Interview plans, factual chronologies, findings

SKILLS

- |                            |                             |                             |                                |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • Employment Counseling    | • Leaves and Accommodations | • Litigation Management     | • Mobility Risk                |
| • Workplace Investigations | • Performance Management    | • Contractor Classification | • Permanent Establishment Risk |
| • Employee Relations       | • Terminations              | • Employer of Record        | • Compensation                 |
| • Wage and Hour Compliance | • Agency Charges            | • Cross Border Remote Work  |                                |

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- Illinois State Bar Association, active member since 2017.
- Association of Workplace Investigators, certificate holder and professional member since 2022.

LANGUAGES

- English (Native)
- Spanish (Beginner)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

**Work Status** : Authorized to work in United States. No sponsorship required.

## REFERENCES

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AVAILABLE ON REQUEST