

VIDA THOMAS

MANAGING PARTNER, OPPENHEIMER INVESTIGATIONS GROUP LLP

Vida Thomas says there's a theme to her life.

"It's that I've always left myself open to opportunities," said Thomas, an attorney and managing partner with the Oppenheimer Investigations Group LLP, a firm that specializes in impartial workplace and school investigations.

For Thomas, the opportunities she seeks aren't self-serving, they're a way to empower others. She was inspired to become a lawyer after reading Harper Lee's seminal 1960 novel,

"To Kill a Mockingbird," in the fifth grade.

"I identified strongly with Atticus Finch," Thomas said. "The story was compelling to me as a little Black girl back then, that this lawyer had the power, through persuasion and logic, to paint a compelling narrative."

Thomas hadn't planned to practice labor and employment law but a stint in business law left her deeply unsatisfied.

"I didn't find it interesting at all," she said.

Then, an opportunity presented itself. The firm where she worked at the time was in the

THE ESSENTIALS

Age:
56

Family:
Married for 29 years. She has two children, Sinclair, 22, and Chase, 17.

Education:
J.D., McGeorge School of Law; B.S., business, Sacramento State

Hobbies:
Gardening and baking. "I am a cookie lover. Just everything about them. You put them together pretty quickly. They're bite-sized and you can make a lot of them in one batch."

What's been your biggest career mistake or biggest lesson learned in your career so far?

"Not learning to say 'no' earlier in my career. Setting boundaries is what has helped me step into my more authentic self."

Something people might be surprised to know:

"I'm a huge fan of the Marvel Cinematic Universe!"

HOUSE VERBAL | CONTRIBUTOR

process of forming a labor and employment department and asked Thomas if she'd be interested in joining. The switch proved to be a better fit.

"The first lawsuit complaint that I read involved a sexual harassment complaint and I was just absorbed from the moment I read it," she said. "Employment law is one of the richest, most fascinating practices."

Thomas practiced employment litigation for decades at several law firms, including her own, Thomas Legal Solutions. In 2020, when Amy Oppenheimer approached Thomas about joining her firm, then known as the Amy Oppenheimer Group, Thomas said she saw the chance to work in a collaborative environment with like-minded attorneys.

"I don't like working by myself. I enjoy people too much," Thomas said. "At Oppenheimer, not only would I not be doing this by myself but I'd be doing it with women I respect and who share my values."

Oppenheimer Investigations is a "neutral shop" that doesn't represent the employer or employee — rather the firm conducts impartial investigations and workplace training.

Amy Oppenheimer views Thomas as a "wise and compassionate" colleague who is integral to their team.

"She gives thoughtful counsel in an honest and kind way that is trustworthy," Oppenheimer said. "She listens to people and leads from a wonderful combination of her head and her heart."

Thomas joined the organization right before the pandemic. When the Covid shutdown went into place, Thomas said she and her colleagues expected that their work would wind down as well.

Instead, she said, it increased dramatically, due in part to the racial reckoning set forth by the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police.

"It was the spark in the tinderbox and our work exploded," she said. "I think it was inspired in part by the 'Me Too' movement that preceded it a few years before. Now employees, particularly Black employees, felt empowered to come forward and speak their truth."

Thomas said she strives to conduct her work with authenticity, empathy and attentiveness, qualities she believes her current workplace also values.

"Of the five partners who own Oppenheimer Investigations, four of us are women of color," she said. "We have remained committed to creating an environment that honors diversity, where everyone feels included and you can be your true self."

— Rachel Leibrock, contributor

