

# Daily Journal

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## Top 20 Under 40



S. Todd Rogers / Daily Journal

### ANDRE GHARAKHANIAN

Silicon Legal Strategy  
San Francisco

**Practice type:** Corporate/transactional  
**Practice specialty:** Technology startups,  
venture capital/angel investors

**Age:** 35

Gharakhanian considers his practice to be “an emotional roller coaster.” “It’s exciting stuff,” he said. “I think when I started to get involved working with startups, I discovered that the legal work was not the difficult part. There is an interpersonal component that is very interesting and intensive.”

For these entrepreneurial endeavors, the stakes are high.

“There is a sense of urgency and anxiety that really makes this engagement not just about technical expertise, but managing the client, being responsive, and knowing how to deliver bad news,” he said. “Most lawyers are not necessarily trained for this kind of work. It’s more about getting your hands dirty, handling the day-in and day-out emotions of your clients.”

In 2007, Gharakhanian left Orrick’s emerging companies group and started Silicon Legal Strategy with a part-time legal assistant. His plan was to “transform and energize the traditional Silicon Valley legal model.”

His team, which now numbers a dozen, resides in a 9,000-square-foot space, with the possibility of expansion.

Gharakhanian, 35, has helped clients close deals with Microsoft, eBay, Amazon, Google, Paramount Pictures, MTV, Facebook, Time-Warner and IBM, among others, and serves as primary deal counsel for Silicon Valley “super angels” Floodgate, Baseline Ventures and Felicis Ventures.

But, he acknowledged, leaving the security of an established firm to strike out on his own stirred some anxiety.

“Fears are most present before you make the leap, leaving a larger firm with an incredible infrastructure support system,” he observed. “You’re always worried about delivering client services and creating a name in the marketplace, without all of those resources.”

It wasn’t a leap that Gharakhanian made quickly.

“It’s something that I thought about for awhile,” he said. “I realized how important

relationships are, so I took the time to take advantage of networking opportunities, to sponsor conferences and speak at events, and establish a name for myself.”

Then the moment came when he said, “Let’s just do this thing.”

“Once I got a few months into it, the fears went away,” Gharakhanian said. “It was more about the sense of urgency around doing a good job, rather than, ‘I don’t have a regular job right now.’”

In the last two years, Gharakhanian figures he’s advised clients in more than 250 early-stage venture capital and angel investor deals.

Among them, TaskRabbit’s \$5 million investment from Shasta Ventures, Zimride’s \$6 million investment from Mayfield Fund and Ticketfly’s \$12 million investment from Mohr Davidow Ventures.

Despite the sour economy elsewhere, Gharakhanian said that Silicon Valley is still vibrant.

“There still is a very strong undercurrent of entrepreneurial fever — a lot of enthusiasm and excitement about investing in new opportunities,” he said. “By contrast, Wall Street investors have a different kind of time frame regarding the investment horizon and how quickly they can expect to make money. Venture capital investors are in it for the long haul. There is an optimism here that wasn’t that deeply affected by the downturn or the global economy. It feels like it has not lost a beat.”

— Pat Broderick