

MVP: Skadden's David Meister

By Parker Quinlan

Law360 (December 11, 2025, 4:03 PM EST) -- David Meister of Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP led a defense team representing Ke "Eric" Tang, the founder of cryptocurrency company KuCoin, scoring a deferred prosecution agreement after federal prosecutors indicted Tang on claims he owned part of an unlicensed money transmitting business, earning him a spot among the 2025 Law360 White Collar MVPs.

His biggest challenge of the year:

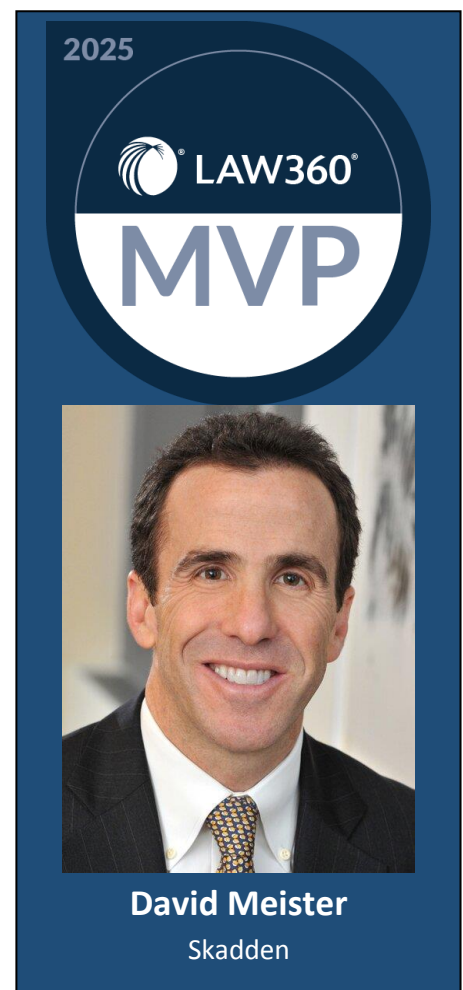
Meister said his biggest challenge this past year has been anticipating how the practice area will evolve, noting that over his more-than-35-year legal career, the terrain has begun shifting with law enforcement interest, with Wall Street and crypto shifting, especially in the last four years.

Two or three years ago, Meister said, the defense bar was more interested in problems related to off-channel communications, with firms worried about the use of unapproved communications channels such as WhatsApp to conduct business.

"All of the lawyers and all of the Wall Street institutions, that was sort of the topic of the day. How are we going to deal with off-channel communications?" Meister said. "There's no cases like that anymore. And so things evolve and things change, in part because those sorts of cases — and that spate of cases — run out."

This year, Meister has spent time defending crypto companies like Crypto.com in a long-running U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission investigation into allegations the website was illegally selling digital assets as unlicensed securities.

Meister said the investigation by the SEC ultimately resulted in the website not being sued, and the agency closed its investigation without any charges, resulting in the company being saved from a lengthy court fight.



His biggest accomplishment of the year:

Meister has also spent time defending crypto industry leaders like Tang, who received a deferred prosecution agreement after being indicted for allegedly failing to implement anti-money laundering protocols within KuCoin.

Tang and co-founder Chun "Michael" Gan were both given deferred prosecution agreements in exchange for paying \$2.7 million apiece and stepping away from involvement in management or operations at KuCoin.

"The reason why this is a significant accomplishment, at least in my view, was because he was indicted by the U.S. Attorney's Office [for the Southern District of New York] for the company being an unlicensed money transmitter, and after being indicted, we were able to negotiate for him a deferred prosecution agreement," Meister said. "I mean the government does offer DPAs, as they're called, but not often after someone has been indicted because there has already been a commitment, you know, kind of an inertia, so that was a significant one."

The future of crypto enforcement under the Trump administration:

Cryptocurrency as an industry has undergone a significant regulatory shift at the start of this year when President Donald Trump began his second term, leading to an end of the Biden-era "war on crypto," Meister said.

Meister said that while he is unsure of just how dramatically different the Trump administration's changes in regulating the industry will be, he believes the administration is likely to work more closely with the industry, which he said is open to more clear regulation.

"I do believe the new administration is more welcoming of crypto businesses, and there was an underlying concern in the prior administration over what is crypto and is crypto in the economy a bad thing, and now it seems in the new administration — not just with criminal enforcement but across the board of SEC and [Commodity Futures Trading Commission] — that there's sort of a much, much more of an openness to the business you will find at the end of the day," Meister said.

Why he's a white collar attorney:

Meister said part of what he enjoys about white collar practice is solving puzzles. He comes from a family that is deeply interested in science. His father is a professor of electrical engineering, and his brother is also an electrical engineer, he said.

Meister graduated with a degree in chemical engineering from the University of Delaware but shifted to law, joking that "being a chemical engineer is just not as cool as you think it is."

The clients are primarily what drives Meister to succeed in his practice area, saying he enjoys the high-stakes nature of white collar litigation and the challenges the practice area presents.

"For many entities and individuals involved in these cases, this is the biggest high-stakes situation that they have ever been in and likely will ever face, and I'm attracted to that sort of situation," Meister said. "I like the combination of this high-stakes criminal environment and complex problem-solving."

Advice for junior attorneys:

White collar practice in particular requires a passion for the practice area; attorneys who want to enter the practice at a firm like Skadden should be prepared to work hard, Meister said, and that it needs to be something an attorney is passionate about.

Meister also said that attorneys should be willing to have a keen interest for fact-finding while also remembering that developing a rapport with clients is important to be able to communicate with them effectively.

"I think it's important to be plainspoken with people so that you can develop a relationship with a client so that they understand what is going on," Meister said. "I think that the personal relationship of what we do, or relationships of what we do, is so important."

--As told to Parker Quinlan. Editing by Dave Trumbore.

Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2025 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 900 submissions.