

A Quick Chat With the Newest Woman Leader in The Am Law 200

By Leigh Jones

When Madeleine McDonough moves into the top spot at Shook, Hardy & Bacon in January, she'll join a small circle of women leaders at major law firms, where they make up just 22 percent of senior management committees.

So, who is this pharmacist-turned-lawyer taking the reins at the product liability powerhouse based in Kansas City, Missouri?

Law.com spoke to McDonough, 53, on Tuesday about her new role at the 483-lawyer firm, her management style and the challenges for women in the legal profession. Questions and answers have been edited for clarity and length.

What's the best advice you ever received, and who gave it to you?

On the professional side, it's something my dad said. He told me, "Schedule your worries." He'd say, "That's something I'll worry about in mid-August."

You said that collaboration is part of your leadership strategy. Isn't that difficult in a law firm partnership where it's inherently competitive?

I view it as a Zen thing. The more you give, the more you get. If you have people

hoarding, then no one is getting the benefit of that, ultimately.

What's the biggest misconception that people have about lawyers?

I was a pharmacist before I was a lawyer. On the day I graduated from law school, I went from being in the most trusted profession to the No. 48 or 49 spot on the list of 50 professions. People don't appreciate lawyers until they need one. When they have one, they overcome that feeling almost immediately—they feel heard, protected.

Why aren't there more women leaders in the legal profession?

It's a multifactorial issue—cultural, historical, among others. It is also a difficult profession in terms of expectations of time commitments. But women can absolutely succeed. It takes awareness of the challenges, early communication and targeted commitment from all sides.

What was your favorite class in high school?

Spanish—I loved learning the language, understanding the diversity of Spanish-speaking cultures, and the challenge of reading and speaking something new and beautiful.



Who's your favorite novelist?

Over the years I have truly come to love Robertson Davies. He said there's usually one perfect word [to use in writing], if you can wait long enough to find it.

Chocolate chip or oatmeal raisin?

Both. My mom was the best chocolate chip cookie-maker on the planet. Oatmeal cookies were her second favorite.

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