

Law Firm Leaders: Shook Hardy's Madeleine McDonough

By Aebra Coe

Law360 (March 11, 2020, 11:25 AM EDT) -- Madeleine McDonough has served as chair of Shook Hardy & Bacon LLP since January 2017, stepping up to lead the firm nearly 30 years after she first joined as a summer associate.

During McDonough's tenure the law firm has grown and added new offices.

Here, McDonough chats with Law360 about how that expansion isn't finished yet, as one of her top goals for the firm is to grow it both in substantive practice areas and geographically.

What are your goals for the law firm over the next five years?

We are definitely in a growth mode. We opened three offices last year: Atlanta, Boston and Los Angeles. We continue to grow. We work really hard at integrating our lateral hires and we are probably going to grow some here pretty soon even this year. We acquired the Philadelphia office of Goodell DeVries [Leech & Dann]. That was about six attorneys and some staff who have now joined our Philadelphia office.

We are growing both in substantive areas that we want to have a deeper and broader bench in, but also geographically.

What is the law firm's strategy behind that growth and what is the ultimate goal of it?

We are growing strategically in commercial litigation, particularly complex commercial litigation, environmental litigation, IP litigation, and we are always looking to deepen our product liability bench. We want to make sure we are developing the right people for succession planning and for depth and breadth in each of those primary areas. We have added in all of those areas and particularly environmental litigation in the last eight months or so.

We really do grow primarily by substance, but there are some geographic areas that we want to develop. Los Angeles is a city that we opened up last year with people we had worked with for a very long time who we viewed as excellent class action lawyers. Even though we had two other offices in California, we had a lot of litigation in L.A. itself. We knew these people very well and we thought this



Madeleine McDonough
Shook Hardy & Bacon Chair

would be a very good addition to our firm. So we look both substantively and geographically.

How does your law firm approach attracting and retaining talent?

We work very hard at that. We have a very robust summer associate program. We hire a lot of new associates from that program, but we also hire laterally.

We have a lot of diversity programs. We interview at every major minority job fair. We started a program here called the scholars institute, which is intended to develop a more robust pipeline of diverse lawyers. We interview law students from all over the country and we hire from that program. Even if they don't decide to come work with us, we stick with them and serve as references for them. We bring in federal and state court judges, clients, we do trial practice programs, networking skills, all sorts of things to help these diverse students. That has been a huge success for us in terms of finding people from different backgrounds with different viewpoints and bringing them on board.

We have a very, I would say, multifaceted approach to hiring where we really try to cast a wide net and think a little more broadly about who we bring in. We think of it as a pipeline from recruiting, hiring and then advancement, promotion. So we have a lot of areas that we focus on in terms of developing attorneys at every level, whether they're staff attorneys, associates, partners. Lots of different programs intended to make sure they succeed here.

I came from a program earlier this morning where we have partnered up junior associates with senior level business developers in the firm. It's a one-on-one mentor program where they shadow the partner, they help the partner with their business development efforts, the partner helps them develop some interviewing and networking skills, their own business development skills, and they learn about different parts of the firm through that program. We have specific things that they might work on together so they can grow and develop more substantively.

Is your sabbatical program one way the firm approaches retention of talent?

The sabbatical program is a longstanding program we've had, I think, for almost 40 years. It's three months. You do have to qualify for it, but I think it's now seven years after you become a partner and every six years after that. You can do anything you want during that three month period. The idea is to help with mental health, burnout, appreciation for people and their hard work. It's also great for succession planning. When key people are away for three months you get an opportunity to introduce additional people to clients and give them increased responsibilities. It's a very popular program. It's the culture here to actually take the sabbaticals and we encourage that. It's something that attracted me 31 years ago when I was a summer associate. I think it's something people see as a real differentiator when they're looking at different firms to join.

What are some of the challenges of managing a large law firm in today's legal industry?

Making sure we are tapping all the best resources possible to address issues. We really value collaboration internally. We reward it, we facilitate it, we expect it. As a means to getting there we have a lot of different ways that we communicate with each other, regular meetings of course, but lots of other ways that we try to have practice groups and industry groups and offices interconnect so that everybody knows what everyone else is doing and we connect the dots up. I think that actually helps us bring the best teams to the clients. So there's a lot of communication and coordination between everybody and it pays dividends for the clients because we can bring a lot of really good people to an

issue even if they're not the primary relationship partner.

For example, I just came from a meeting. Every Tuesday morning we put together different combinations of practice groups and offices. We get together three or four of those different groups and we have a phone call where we talk about what we're doing, what comes up, and invariably there are little miracles that happen. Somebody says, I didn't know the Seattle office is doing this, the Miami office recently did that. It's one way we try to establish informal communication plans that end up helping everybody.

I think as firms get bigger they need to find different ways to communicate multiple different ways and I think we do that pretty well.

If you could have lunch with any well-known lawyer, alive or dead, who would it be and why?

Could I do a lunch group?

Sure.

There are three people that are popping into my head. Two are no longer with us, one is very much with us. A historic lawyer I've been reading about is a guy named Hugo Grotius. He was a philosopher lawyer and he developed what was called the first treatise to develop international law. He tried to come up with a treatise to approach the way that different countries might get along with each other through mutual understanding rather than thorough war. I think that treatise he put together is still a basis for modern international law. It was a very renaissance way of thinking about the law at the time.

I also think Thurgood Marshall would be really interesting to talk to. He approached things how he thought they ought to be, not how they were. His creativity was amazing, and of course all of his accomplishments. I'd love to hear the two of them talk together.

And then for a current day lunch date, [Roberta] Robbie Kaplan would be very interesting. She's someone who had the courage to leave a large law firm, start her own law firm. She of course handled the [Defense of Marriage Act] case with Edie Windsor. She's also represented citizens in Charlottesville against the Nazis. She takes on all kinds of civil rights cases and she also handles all sorts of more traditional corporate defense work. To me, she's kind of a modern day renaissance lawyer who shows a lot of courage on a daily basis. I could imagine a lunch with Hugo, Thurgood and Robbie and I would love to ask them about a thousand questions.

--Editing by Katherine Rautenberg.