

## Why This Longtime In-House Lawyer Left Walmart for Big Law

By Phillip Bantz

### What You Need to Know

- Veronica Gromada spent 17 years as an in-house lawyer at Walmart.
- She most recently led a team of 65 lawyers overseeing the retail giant's massive tort litigation portfolio.
- Now, she's joining Shook as a partner in the firm's products liability litigation practice.

After 17 years as a lawyer for Walmart Inc., Veronica Gromada is exiting the in-house world and returning to private practice.

Gromada has joined [Shook, Hardy & Bacon](#) as a partner on the firm's products liability litigation team in Washington, D.C., and Houston.

During her time at Walmart, Gromada worked with Shook partner Patrick Oot on mass tort strategy and pre-trial litigation matters. Oot, co-chair of the firm's data and discovery strategies practice group, said Gromada "brings a global in-house view that few have, with a laser focus on litigation."

She most recently served as managing counsel at Walmart's headquarters in Bentonville, Arkansas, where she led a team of 65 lawyers overseeing the retail giant's tort litigation portfolio, which includes about 5,000 stores, distribution centers and e-commerce.

Gromada arrived at Walmart in 2005 as a senior counsel and worked her way up the legal department ladder in various positions of increasing responsibility, including assistant general counsel and senior associate GC.

Before she went in-house for Walmart, Gromada worked as an associate at two Texas law firms, [Hartline Dacus Barger Dreyer & Kern](#) and the now-defunct [Shannon, Gracey, Ratliff & Miller](#).

She spoke with Corporate Counsel about her "life change decision" to return to private practice, the so-called "Great Reflection" (as opposed to the "Great Resignation") trends to watch in the products liability litigation space and her commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.

The conversation has been edited for clarity and length.

**Corporate Counsel: So talk to me about your decision to leave the in-house realm after 17 years and go into private practice.**

**Veronica Gromada:** It was not just a career decision. It was a life change decision. Since I have been at Walmart, I have grown as a lawyer, as a leader and as a business professional. I just see this as a prime time in my life and in my career to take all of the many learnings from the experiences at Walmart and leverage that to serve corporate clients across the country. I'm really excited to get back to a bit of city life and to work with an array of clients that will bring my talents to the forefront.

**CC: Can we dig into that life change decision comment a little bit more?**

**VG:** So one thing that COVID definitely taught me is that I really hunger for more people interaction. Going to an organization like Shook will afford me the opportunity to work with clients across the country with sophisticated portfolios in a number of vibrant and exciting cities. And I'm just looking forward to working in that type of environment.

**CC: We've heard a lot about the so-called "Great Resignation." I heard someone say, you know, it's not really the "Great Resignation," it's the "Great Reflection." And it kind of sounds like you're part of that. Would that be accurate?**

**VG:** Yes. I'm definitely a part of the "Great Reflection." Part of the reason I chose Shook is I've had a long-standing relationship with one of its partners, Patrick Oot. So in sharing with my friend and now colleague my reflection on life and



Veronica Hayes Gromada, partner with Shook, Hardy and Bacon.

Courtesy photo.

career during the pandemic, and thinking about what's next for me, he suggested that I consider Shook.

I hadn't really contemplated going to a law firm. I always said to myself, "If I were to leave Walmart—after 17 years, I was obviously happy and had a successful career there—but if I were going to leave Walmart, it would have to be for something that was going to help take my career to the next level."

And something that was important to me would be to do so at a point in my life before a certain age, where I could make that pivot and not be viewed as someone who was very much of a certain ilk from being involved in a certain organization. So in talking to Patrick and just really thinking about what I know of him and the type of lawyer he is but also the reputation of the Shook lawyers, it just really aligned with where I wanted to go professionally. It's the type of interesting dynamic work I want to do.

**CC: To what extent, if any, did you have concerns about returning to private practice after almost two decades in-house?**

**VG:** I've been very fortunate because I've had the benefit of being involved in significant litigation across the country. My practice has been very hands-on over the years, even as far as continuing to be involved in prepping corporate representatives to be presented for deposition to being involved in actively managing complex discovery issues, redlining briefs and such. So I've been very hands-on in lawyering cases, even from my seat in-house over the years.

I'm a stronger lawyer, leader and business person after my stint in-house. From a leadership and business standpoint, I understand clients now far better than I did when I was in private practice.

I was a good outside counsel before, I know it will be a great one today, because I can see doing things through the lens of the client and I can balance what the client's solving for between managing straightforward litigation or legal issues with whatever the reputational and financial concerns may be, and making sure that I'm not over-indexing on one over the other.

**CC: What are some trends in the products liability litigation landscape that are on your radar and would be of interest to in-house leaders?**

**VG:** A lot of mass and class litigation has been a bit disrupted by COVID, as far as the cadence of litigation on a mass and class scale. As things get back to more of a

sense of normalcy from a litigation standpoint, it's going to be interesting to see how mass and class litigation that has maybe stalled during the pandemic is going to pick up and continue going forward—and whether the litigants are prepared to pick up where they left off. That's definitely something that is front of mind.

Secondarily, even from a product or mass and class litigation standpoint, ESG is definitely something that I know a lot of corporations have front of mind right now, recognizing the importance of being a good corporate citizen of the society, of the planet, is very important.

It's going to be interesting to see how the convergence of a company's need to balance reputational considerations around environmental, social and governance issues against litigation and risk management issues at the same time. I can definitely see the need for some proactive management in that regard.

**CC: Is there anything that you would like to add here before we wrap up the conversation?**

**VG:** I'm really excited about the growth that Shook is experiencing and also about the organization being very intentional about bringing on more diverse talent. Today, Shook has promoted 17 partners and 10 are women. That's something that's very, very meaningful to me. And I believe about 45% of the executive committee are women and/or diverse attorneys. That's something that's important to me.

The head of our diversity committee is John Lewis, who's the managing partner of our Houston office. I have been having discussions with John and will partner very closely with him on those initiatives as well as many other partners in the organization.

Diversity inclusion has definitely been something very near and dear to my heart throughout my professional career. I'm very committed as well to talent development and to the extent that I can help the firm groom and grow the talent within the firm amongst the associate ranks, I am happy and excited to do that as well.

**CC: Thank you for adding that. And I actually have one more question for you. Will Walmart be one of your clients now?**

**VG:** Walmart has been a client of Shook for quite a number of years, and I hope to have the opportunity to continue to serve my former employer as outside counsel. And I'm cautiously optimistic that I'll be able to do so.