

Kimberly McMullan becomes partner while enjoying flexible schedule

When Kimberly McMullan moved from Boston to Houston in 2002, she was faced with a difficult decision: accept a position at one of the city's most well known firms, or become the 11th attorney (and one of only two women) at Yetter & Warden, L.L.P., a respected litigation boutique specializing in business and technology litigation.

"I really struggled with the decision. After graduating from Harvard, I spent three years at a large Boston firm, so the prospect of joining a similar firm here in Houston was appealing. But the idea of trying the same kind of high-stakes cases in a small firm environment was tempting."

Ultimately, McMullan chose Yetter & Warden and says she couldn't be happier with her decision.

"I work on intellectually challenging cases with some of the most talented lawyers in Texas. A young attorney couldn't ask for more."

And that 11-lawyer firm she joined in 2003 is about to become a 30-lawyer firm, recently announcing the opening of its Austin office, which will house the firm's expanding appellate practice, led by renowned appellate lawyer Greg Coleman.

"When I joined Yetter & Warden, Wendie Childress was the lone woman attorney, and now we have eight in our Houston office. You won't find a more skilled or supportive group of women attorneys anywhere."

With so many women joining the firm in recent years, Yetter & Warden has begun to face issues that all firms eventually must tackle. In 2004, McMullan gave birth to her first child, daughter Brooke, and became the first woman attorney at the firm to go on maternity leave.

During her leave, McMullan gave much thought to what she wanted to do when that time was up. Her goals were no different than those of many women with young children: maximizing her time with her daughter without sacrificing the progress made in her career. Again, the firm was open-minded.

"We decided on a schedule that lets me work reduced hours each day, both from home and in the office. It gives me precious time with my daughter, and allows me to take on important responsibilities on challenging cases," says McMullan.

Five attorneys currently work reduced schedules, including Y. Ping Sun (wife of Rice University President David Leebron). Each has a different arrangement, key to retaining the firm's accomplished women lawyers.

"Flexibility is crucial. Just because women want a reduced schedule for childcare reasons does not mean that the same schedule will work for everyone. If the firm tried to impose a rigid part-time schedule upon each of us, it simply wouldn't work."

McMullan says her part-time schedule is working for her. She shoulders great responsibility on high-stakes matters, including two \$500 million corporate securities cases, but she recognizes the flexibility needed to make the arrangement work is a two-way street.

"The firm lets me work reduced hours, and work from home some of the week. I appreciate that my flexibility also is necessary for the arrangement to succeed. Clients or co-counsel won't always be able to talk between the hours of nine and two."



"When it came time to discuss what arrangements the firm offered, we were treading new ground. But the firm's approach was refreshing. Paul Yetter asked me what other firms offered and what I thought was fair, and we went from there. The result was a competitive six-month leave policy that two other women attorneys have since taken too."

Yet, McMullan says she feels no pressure to return full-schedule.

"David Warden encouraged me to enjoy the time I have with Brooke and not rush back to a full-time schedule. His words reinforced what I already felt — that the firm wants reduced schedules to work."

The firm's commitment to its women attorneys recently was reaffirmed when McMullan was elevated to partner.

"It sends a strong message to our current women attorneys, to those we recruit and to the market generally. Part-time schedules can work, and you can advance your career while working reduced hours."

Like anything in life, the arrangement isn't always perfect, and sometimes her colleagues forget she is part time.

"Occasionally I have to invoke one of my two-year old's favorite words: 'no.' It is easy to fall into a pattern of taking on work that is given to you, regardless of how much it is or how full your reduced hours already are. But I have to speak up, alert people to my time constraints and say no if I want this to work."

There is one aspect of a full-time schedule McMullan misses: seeing her colleagues on a daily basis.

"It is no exaggeration to say that our firm has one of the most amazing groups of women attorneys anywhere. Their experiences and accomplishments are incredible, and they are committed to making Yetter & Warden a place where women lawyers flourish."

Women attorneys are at the forefront of important firm initiatives. For example, Pam Hohensee leads the firm's client development committee, with fellow committee member Anna Rotman providing important insights. McMullan also cites Dori Kornfeld and Janet Garza for their leadership.

"Dori and Janet organized a tour of the Menil art gallery for women professionals of diverse backgrounds. It was a wonderful opportunity for the firm to showcase its remarkable women attorneys, while at the same time providing an excellent networking opportunity for all the women who attended."

For a small but growing firm, McMullan says Yetter & Warden is getting things right.

"I can't think of a better firm for a woman attorney," she says.

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