

How I Made Office Co-Managing Partner: 'A Combination of Business Acumen, Client Relationships and a Commitment to the Firm,' Says Ramona Nee of Weil, Gotshal & Manges

Advocate for others early and often. Advocate for yourself too—don't be passive.

By Tasha Norman

Ramona Nee, Weil, Gotshal & Manges, Boston.

Job title: Co-managing partner, Boston.

Practice area: Private equity/Corporate transactions.

Law school and year of graduation: Boston University School of Law, 2001.

How long have you been at the firm? Since September 2002 (for the opening of the Boston office!)

How long were you a partner at the firm? I have been a partner for 5½ years.

What year were you promoted to your current role at your current firm? I was appointed co-managing partner in Boston this year.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in promoting you to your current role? I believe it was a combination of strong business acumen, deep client relationships and, most importantly, an enduring commitment to the practice group and the firm. I do not believe it was related to my performance on any particular deal or for any specific client—a successful

transactional attorney does not necessarily translate into an effective leader.

What are your key responsibilities, and what unique challenges do you face as it relates to your role? My key responsibilities as co-managing partner in Boston are to listen and to advocate for others. A willingness and ability to consider issues and opportunities through the multiple lenses of the office, our practice group and the firm as a whole will be key to my success ahead.

Like other law firms, our biggest challenges in the near term include recruiting and retention. Fortunately, Weil Boston has established itself over the past two decades as a powerhouse for private equity and transactional-based work. Still, the legal market in Boston is smaller than New York or London, and the competition for talent here is fierce. Weil's Boston office has a special culture—it's small enough that we really do feel like a family. Maintaining that culture while finding and keeping the best talent is both our biggest challenge and our biggest source of pride. We are fortunate in that some of the most sophisticated and talented financial sponsors view Weil as their long-



Ramona Nee
Courtesy Photo

term partner and trusted adviser. But again, talented competitors are around every corner, so we need to stay at the leading edge of industry trends and provide a deep bench of expertise in all of the practice areas that our clients need to execute strategic transactions. We must avoid complacency, both internally and externally, at all costs.

What's the best piece of advice you give to someone who wants to rise up the ranks to lead an office? Focus first on your practice and developing deep client relationships. Dedicate your formative years to becoming an excellent lawyer, building

a high-performance internal team and providing repeatedly outstanding client service. It is impossible to lead a group of highly intelligent and highly driven lawyers without a robust practice and an understanding of what they need and what is most challenging to them (both daily challenges and longer-term concerns).

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to your current role? Jim Westra, chief legal officer of Advent International Corp. and former managing partner of Weil Boston. Jim hired me right out of law school 20 years ago, and I had the good fortune of learning directly from him when he was at Weil for the first 10 years of my practice. For the past decade or so, I have been able to continue working with and learning from him as a client since he has been at Advent. Jim has a number of outstanding qualities, but what probably stands out most is his unique ability to defuse any situation and pivot even the most stressful dynamic toward a constructive conversation and ultimate resolution. Jim inspires confidence from every party in the room. In part, this is because he is an industry titan: He has decades of experience practicing sophisticated deal work for the most demanding private equity clients. But more singular and more impressive is Jim's general presence. He commands a room in any situation and is able to do so in an understated manner that consistently exudes both candor and humanity. It

is a very rare combination, and I feel incredibly lucky to have “grown up” as a lawyer with Jim as a boss, client, mentor, sponsor and friend.

Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to yourself, and what would you do differently? Advocate for others early and often. Advocate for yourself too—don't be passive. For too long I would take comfort in knowing that my team or I produced high-quality work and hoped that the work would speak for itself. It does not!

Also, the practice of law (and deal work, in particular) is not a solo mission. Build a trusted internal network as you grow your own practice and your personal brand. Our industry is dynamic and ever-changing, and we need to work together to get the best results. The collective brain trust of our office and our practice group is much more effective at crafting solutions to new issues (or for finding a new angle on an old issue) than any single lawyer working alone.

What three key terms would you use to describe your work mindset?

1. The rising tide lifts all boats.
2. Be the duck. [Calm on the surface, paddling furiously underneath]
3. Authenticity.

What initiatives are you working on currently, and what impact do you hope to achieve? I'm a member of TOWER, Weil's task force for the advancement and development of women at the firm (and a member of Weil's task force for Diversity in Firm



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Leadership). I'm also a member of the steering committee for Weil's Legal Innovators program, which engages incoming law students in addressing some of the most pressing social and legal challenges in our communities today.

As a law firm leader, what impact would you like to have on your firm and/or the legal industry as a whole? Senior leaders at Weil recognize the importance of approaching leadership roles from a long-term perspective and in a thoughtful and methodical manner. If we identify and support a diverse group of potential firm leaders from very early on in their careers and provide them with the tools and support to grow into extraordinary lawyers with strong client relationships, then we make tangible progress on our commitment to present a leadership slate that is representative of the entire ecosystem of our firm. I'm excited to continue to work with our leadership on this firmwide imperative, and I know that our private equity clients—and clients across all practice areas—are looking for us to lead the charge in effecting this type of change.