

Weil

## Tim Gardner: Belief in a single-minded focus

**The managing partner of Weil, Gotshal & Manges' Hong Kong office talks about structural pressures, predictions for Asia's financial hub, the link between talent retention and transparency, and how a ping pong table helps bring his team together**

### **How would you define your firm's culture, and how important is that culture to you?**

Weil has been and continues to be a first-mover in partnering with clients to understand the full picture of their needs and help them achieve strategic goals; as a pioneer in numerous fields such as restructuring, private equity, patent litigation,

and diversity and inclusion. Our attention to client service rests upon a few core values, including a comprehensive understanding of our clients' businesses and culture, a thorough focus on our clients' objectives, both short-term and long-term, and an unwavering commitment to helping clients solve problems in the most efficient, cost-effective way. With an entrepreneurial spirit at our core, we bring



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passion, creativity, and optimism to all that we approach. Weil is also committed to engaging as a responsible corporate citizen in the communities where we live and work.

### Since becoming managing partner what's surprised you most about running the Hong Kong office of Weil?

The sheer volume of administrative tasks involved! Fortunately, I was well prepared for my role by my predecessor, the legendary Akiko Mikumo. Administrative matters need to be handled of course, and some of them are time sensitive. However, the important thing is that they don't distract from what matters most – our clients and our people.

### What's the main change you've made in the Hong Kong office that will benefit clients?

I wanted to create a stronger sense of community within our office by using unconventional ways to interact with clients

and one another. One example of this is the ping pong table we have in the office. I believe we have some of the best technical lawyers in town (a bit biased, I realise), but I wanted to inject something else into the office that was fun and whimsical. When we get together and play, we're not only having fun, we're fostering the esprit de corps that binds us together and makes us such a strong team. It's good for us, and it's good for our clients too.

### How has your role/involvement in client-facing work changed since becoming managing partner?

The biggest change to the way I have to work is to look beyond my own client responsibilities to support colleagues in developing their own client portfolios. As managing partner, a significant portion of my time is now spent on promoting the firm and its capabilities on a much larger scale.

## “The influx of major Chinese firms, alternative legal providers, and even AI and other legal technology will continue to impact the Hong Kong market.”

### What are the biggest challenges facing firms in Hong Kong?

There is no doubt that the Hong Kong legal market remains intensely competitive and clients are increasingly sensitive to legal costs. Law firms doing transactional work here largely fall into two camps – those who rely on a high volume of fairly routine matters, and those who work on a smaller number of complex, high-stakes matters. We are part of the latter camp, and we believe our single-minded focus on complex private equity and M&A transactions gives us a more defensible niche in light of the structural pressures in this market.

### What are your predictions for the market?

The influx of major Chinese firms, alternative legal providers, and even AI and other legal technology will continue to impact the Hong Kong market. But I think this will largely affect the commoditised, lower end of the value chain rather than the type of

work we focus on. Our private equity clients have raised record amounts of 'dry powder' and we are confident that Asia will continue to have strong growth prospects. Hong Kong has long been Asia's leading hub for finance and business and we don't see that changing in the near future.

### What do you think are the top three things most clients want and why?

Clients are looking for their outside counsel to act as strategic business partners by understanding the full picture of their needs and helping achieve their strategic goals. They want lawyers who can provide a commercial-minded, pragmatic approach to offering practical solutions to their most complex issues. In addition, efficiency remains to be a crucial factor with regard to outside counsel.

### Is technology changing the way you interact with your clients and the

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## services you can provide them?

Both globally and regionally, our clients are increasingly adopting cutting-edge technologies to work better and smarter and they expect us to do the same. Spearheaded by our London office, our firm is piloting a number of innovative technologies which will help automate some of the more repetitive, time consuming tasks so that our lawyers can focus on delivering high-end, bespoke value-add services.

## What does innovation mean to you and how can firms be better at it?

Innovation means thinking outside the box and not being afraid to be a first mover. The legal field has changed so much over the past several years and we will continue to see incredible change, so it is crucial that firms think about how to implement innovation – as it pertains to

people, process and technology – and make positive changes that will contribute to the evolution of the field.

## What have you found is the best way to retain talent?

It’s important to offer exposure to interesting and challenging work, as well as professional development opportunities, such as regular trainings and evaluations. We place a high priority on mentoring relationships, both formal and informal. Weil has also been a pioneer in the talent retention arena; in 2018, Weil announced that it would shorten the length of its partner track, making a promotion to partner possible after seven-and-a-half years. As part of the change, the firm will tell associates at the end of their fifth year about their prospects for advancement. I believe there is a strong connection between transparency and talent retention, so providing clear feedback on career development is key.

## What are the firm’s policies on diversity and inclusion?

Diversity and inclusion have been core values since our founding. For the past 30 years, Weil has been a leader in investing in formal initiatives to empower and engender an inclusive culture. Our culture of respect and support creates an environment where all feel comfortable and encouraged to excel. For more information on Weil’s diversity & inclusion policies and programs, you can visit: [www.weil.com/about-weil/diversity-and-inclusion](http://www.weil.com/about-weil/diversity-and-inclusion)

## How do you ensure good mental health and wellbeing among your lawyers and staff?

Weil is committed to supporting the mental health and wellness of its employees by offering a number of programs and benefits to emphasising

how to prioritise mental health. The firm also offers resources and assistance for those in need of support.

## Finally, what advice do you have for the next generation of partners?

Notwithstanding the onslaught of technology, this is still a people business. It’s very easy to fall into the trap of doing most of your internal and external communicating via email. Take the time to get to know your associates. Take the time to get to know your clients. In person. You will be richly rewarded. ●