

# Teamwork and Mentoring

An Interview with Sandy Kuzmich, PhD, Firm Managing Partner, Haug Partners LLP



Sandy Kuzmich, PhD

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Sandy Kuzmich, PhD, focuses on patent litigation and strategic intellectual property counseling in the areas of pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and biotechnology. Recognizing that product life-cycle management is continuous and dynamic, she develops, manages, and protects diverse patent portfolios, taking into consideration a client's immediate and long-term business objectives. Her extensive experience in pharmaceutical patent litigation allows her to offer a distinctive approach to protecting and maximizing the value of intellectual property assets. She specializes in counseling clients on how to obtain strong and diverse intellectual property protection on pharmaceuticals and biological products during*

*early research, and how to expand and defend that protection throughout development, product launch, and beyond. Upon completion of her graduate degree in pharmacology, Kuzmich became a post-doctoral research associate with the Fox Chase Cancer Center where she investigated mechanisms of anti-cancer drug resistance. She spent several years in the private pharmaceutical sector, managing departments in the U.S. in the areas of drug metabolism and pharmacokinetics, and also collaborating with her counterparts in Europe and Asia to coordinate worldwide regulatory submissions. Kuzmich serves as Secretary on the Board of Directors for the Federal Circuit Bar Association, which includes being a frequent lecturer at various international conferences throughout the year. She earned a BA in chemistry, Phi Beta Kappa, from Douglass College, Rutgers University; a PhD in pharmacology from Yale University; and a JD from Fordham University.*

## What has been your personal mission as Managing Partner of Haug Partners?

I agreed to take on the role of Managing Partner because at this point in my career I have the experience and flexibility to devote time to preparing the Firm for the future. To me, that means taking what has worked and expanding upon it, but also having the foresight to evolve and pivot so that the Firm can meet the challenges that lie ahead. When I was elected Managing Partner in August 2019, I could not have imagined that six months later I would be faced with running the business in the midst of a pandemic. What I had planned to focus on had to take a back seat to the challenges that confronted us because of the pandemic.

## What was it like to encounter the pandemic and how did Haug Partners adapt its business during this uncertain time?

The biggest challenge I have faced to date as Managing Partner was running the business leading up to, during, and after the pandemic. I was fortunate enough to be surrounded by a small but incredibly knowledgeable and dedicated administration that worked with me to transition attorneys and staff to a fully remote operation in anticipation of lockdown in February 2020. Because of our size and our collaborative culture, we were able to manage this transition efficiently and continue to function effectively while being fully remote so that we could focus on our business, which was to service our clients without interruption.

## What is the biggest challenge you have faced coming out of the pandemic?

No question, the tension between remote work versus physical presence in the office. Our Firm has always had, and still does have, a culture

that emphasizes teamwork and mentoring, much of which is done through in-person collaborations at the office. And many of the most valuable interactions happen on the spur of the moment, which means a group of professionals getting together in a conference room to brainstorm an issue. Remote platforms, as good as they may be, don't really lend themselves to this type of collaborative mentoring. Because of our culture that has for 25 years emphasized the value of interpersonal interactions in professional development, the majority of our attorneys have returned to the office on almost a full-time basis. In contrast to some large general practice law firms, we have not had to mandate that attorneys be in the office a specific number of days a week – that has happened organically.

## Will you discuss Haug Partners' efforts around diversity and inclusion?

Now that the pandemic is in our rearview mirror, I have been able to turn more of my attention to issues related to positioning the Firm for the next generation. Diversity is one of those issues. Post-pandemic I established a Diversity Committee, and the Firm became a member of the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD), where I have pledged to continue to make inroads on the issues of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). Through the Federal Circuit Bar Association (FCBA), of which I am a board member and have been nominated for the position of Secretary beginning July 2023, I have fostered the participation of the Firm's associates in mock appellate arguments before the judges of the Federal Circuit and mock pitches before in-house counsel. As an alumni of Douglass College, Rutgers University, every summer I sponsor two externs from the Reilly Program at the BOLD Center at Douglass. Our partnership with this program gives women an opportunity for a real-world experience of law-firm life at an early stage of their education.

My approach to DEI is holistic, and not limited to what I do at Haug Partners. I was elected to the Board of Yale's Graduate Student Alumni Association where I serve as a co-chair of the DEIB ("B" for "Belonging") Committee.

## In addition to your efforts in DEI, what other areas do you think are important as you look to shaping the future of the Firm?

I would like us to do more in the area of pro bono work. It is a real win-win for the client, and also for our young attorneys. The client benefits through attorney representation. On the other hand, our attorneys have the opportunity to argue cases before a judge, which sometimes does not occur early in a career because a lot of what we do is based upon written submissions to the court.

Because the pro bono prospects in the field of intellectual property law are not always available, we encourage our associates to take on pro bono work that interests them and gives them an opportunity to develop their skills. Appellate work concerning unemployment benefits, issues related to New York City small businesses, and legal assistance to Afghan nationals in need are just some of the Firm's pro bono efforts.

## You and Ed are both now managing the firm. Do you still have the chance to practice law together?

Yes we do, and we still have fun after all these years. Just recently, together we represented the Intellectual Property Law Professors and Scholars in the filing of an amicus brief before the Supreme Court in a high-profile intellectual property appeal. Not only was an aspect of the brief raised at oral argument, but the brief was cited and quoted in the Supreme Court's written decision. Moments like this never get old. ●