

A Collaborative Culture

An Interview with Linda M. Doyle, General Counsel, McDermott Will & Emery

EDITORS' NOTE Linda Doyle serves as the firm's General Counsel. Prior to her appointment to this position, Doyle focused her practice on all aspects of employment-related litigation and counseling. She has advised boards of directors and employers on employment issues, develops and delivers training sessions for employees and management, and conducts internal investigations relating to whistleblower, discrimination, and other claims. Doyle has experience



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in negotiating labor contracts and representing clients in arbitrations under collective bargaining agreements, as well as in proceedings before the National Labor Relations Board and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). She also counsels private equity companies, investors and boards of directors on leadership change and succession issues. Her trial experience includes class actions and single-plaintiff actions related to non-competition agreements, trade secrets and unfair competition; whistleblower claims under state law, the Sarbanes-Oxley Act and the False Claims Act; executive compensation; discrimination; harassment; wrongful termination; wage-and-hour disputes; and benefits. She previously served as the firm's chief human resources officer, deputy general counsel, and hiring partner. Doyle has been recognized in Chambers USA 2008 to 2018, Labor & Employment; Benchmark Litigation 2014 to 2019, Litigation Star, Labor & Employment; and The Legal 500. She is a board member of the Shattered Globe Theatre Company. Doyle earned a BS degree from St. Joseph's University and a JD degree from the University of Michigan Law School.

FIRM BRIEF As a top-ranked global law firm with more than 1,400 lawyers, McDermott Will & Emery (mwe.com) serves many of the world's leading companies and privately held businesses. Guided by its mantra of #AlwaysBetter, the firm focuses both on being indispensable to clients and creating a culture of happiness and excellence. In doing so, colleagues work seamlessly across practices, geographies, and industries to deliver solutions that propel sustained success.

What have been the keys to McDermott's industry leadership and how do you describe the McDermott difference?

One of the keys to our success in recent years – our ascension in financial performance, brand recognition, and in the rankings for client service, innovation, etc. – has been our laser focus on doing just that. We set very specific goals, we measure our progress from every angle, and we talk openly and transparently about our success and where we are falling short. Where we fall short, we figure out why and either push harder or reset, as necessary. And we have fostered a culture where everyone in the firm is accountable for and participates in our success. It is exciting and motivating.

Will you highlight McDermott's culture and values?

Our culture is the glue that keeps us together at McDermott and that drives us to do our very best work for our clients and our firm. I would describe our culture and values statement as providing excellent service to our clients in a collaborative way. We spend a lot

of time together – more of that in person which is great. We push ourselves and each other to do great work and we support each other so that we enjoy doing that work together. This is a demanding job, and we need that support to do it well. I have had some challenging tasks in my role. I can always lean on my partners and their expertise. They take my calls and jump in to help when I ask. That is the culture we foster.

Will you provide an overview of your role and areas of focus?

I am the firm's General Counsel and in that role, I oversee or support everything that involves risk. Broadly, I lead managing claims against the firm and, more importantly, avoiding claims, via policies, training, and processes. I oversee our governance, partnership, and insurance functions. I oversee the Conflicts and Intake (new business) function. I oversee our Global Privacy and Compliance functions. I support HR, Procurement and real-estate as needed. I work with our CIO and CISO who lead our cyber-security function. And I work with our CFO on various tax compliance issues and other issues. It is a broad and very interesting job.

How critical is it for the General Counsel role to be engaged in business strategy?

At McDermott – it is very important. Our primary goal in the firm's GC function is, of course, risk avoidance and mitigation. But our actions, policies, advice and counsel are designed to foster that goal and help drive the business forward to meet its strategic goals. Ira (Coleman, chairman of McDermott) was very focused on reshaping the GC function in that regard. He asked me to serve on the Executive and Management Committees and provided me

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with a team so that I can help him; our COO, John Yoshimura; and our MC to set and meet the firm’s strategic goals.

Will you discuss McDermott’s commitment to build a diverse and inclusive workforce?

We are committed to diversity because it is the right thing to do – it is good for our firm and our clients. A diverse work force means we have people with different experiences, ideas, and perspectives. That leads to better decision-making and better solutions for our clients. And I think that people are happier in a diverse and inclusive culture where there isn’t a “type,” and everyone belongs. You can’t just have diversity as a goal. You have to take purposeful actions toward that goal, and we do.

McDermott commits time and resources to pro bono work. How engrained is pro bono and community engagement in McDermott’s culture?

Pro bono and community service is engrained at McDermott and has been for the 22 years I have been here. When I joined, we had a partner devoted to leading pro bono. Now we have three partners, and other lawyers and an administrative team dedicated full time to that effort. Pro bono runs like a practice group. There are thousands of different opportunities presented to both lawyers and other professionals. We have community service events in every office, often. We measure both our time and our impact. We give credit for time lawyers spend on pro bono and while that is important, I think that what really motivates people is how much we embrace and celebrate pro bono. People want to do this work. It is a critical component of our culture. It inspires us in a deep and personal way.

You have served in many leadership roles at McDermott, including as chief human resources officer. Has this broad experience been helpful in your role as General Counsel?

Yes – absolutely. I was the National Hiring Partner and the CHRO while I practiced. Before I became the CHRO, I served as the employment lawyer for the partnership and supported HR. Those roles lead to knowing the firm, the people, and the processes on a deep level. Knowing the firm as well as I do has really helped me in this job. And, in those roles, I learned about leadership. I had to lead people and processes and manage big change. That is essentially what I now do.

Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women in leadership positions in the industry?

Not as many as there should be, but I hope that is changing. Take my role: there are not many women GCs in AM Law 50 – or even 100 – firms. There are many really smart and thoughtful women in deputy GC roles, and I hope that those women get the top job when the opportunity comes.

Did you always know you had an interest in pursuing a career in the legal profession?

No. As an undergraduate, I was focused on a career in Labor Relations. I was familiar with that path because of my family experiences – my father and grandfather were union representatives. After college and with my business degree in LR, I worked as a labor relations consultant. I went to law school because I thought it was time to go to graduate school to advance in that field. I loved law school. That and practicing in a large law firm, broadened my career aspirations. A few years into my time at McDermott, a partner

convinced me that I would enjoy being a trial lawyer instead of a labor lawyer, so I became a trial lawyer. My path was not linear or planned, but it was the right one for me.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers?

Keep your eyes open for opportunities and say yes. My career trajectory is in large part because I said yes (a lot) to key opportunities, even those outside of my comfort zone. I had a partner mentor early at McDermott – not a formal one but someone I met getting a cup of coffee. I said hello and introduced myself because I was a very new lateral associate and did not know many people. He later asked me to step into a case I knew nothing about. I was nervous, but I said yes. That case was so interesting; I learned a lot and had a lot of fun working on it. Later, he suggested that I transition to the Trial Practice. Again, I said yes and I loved the 15 or so years that I spent in the Trial Practice at McDermott.

I was also asked early on to get involved in legal recruiting at my alma mater, the University of Michigan. I said yes in an effort to meet more people. Later I said yes to being a National Hiring Partner. In that role, I got to know our then Chairman and the head of our Compensation Committee. They asked me to be the CHRO part-time while I was still practicing. I said yes even though I was nervous that I could not do both jobs well. In that role, I met Ira Coleman who was then the head of the Miami office and a member of the Management Committee. When Ira became our Chairman, he expanded my role and a year later he asked me to become the fulltime GC. I said yes.

So, introducing myself to people every chance I got, and many yeses, led me to a really rewarding career at McDermott. ●

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