

# A Winning Culture

An Interview with Beth A. Wilkinson  
Partner – Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP

**EDITORS' NOTE** Beth Wilkinson is a Partner in the Litigation Department at Paul, Weiss. She is regarded as one of the nation's most respected litigators who is sought out by Fortune 100 and Fortune 500 companies for her courtroom skills and winning track record in some of the most business-critical litigations in recent memory. She began her legal career in the U.S. Army, attained the rank of Captain, and assisted in the prosecution of U.S.



Beth A. Wilkinson

*v. Manuel Noriega. After prosecuting U.S. v. McVeigh & Nichols for the Oklahoma City bombings, she became the only two-time recipient of the Department of Justice's highest award. She was recruited by Fannie Mae as Executive VP and General Counsel, and Corporate Secretary in 2006, a position she held until its sale to the government in 2008. She has been named a "Winning" litigator and one of "Washington's Most Influential Women Lawyers" by The National Law Journal.*

**FIRM BRIEF** Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP ([paulweiss.com](http://paulweiss.com)) is a prominent law firm headquartered in New York City. The firm has over 800 lawyers worldwide, and market-leading litigation, regulatory, and corporate practices. Paul, Weiss has garnered numerous awards for excellence and has been widely recognized for its pro bono achievements and its commitment to diversity.

■  
**Pro bono and public service have been central tenets of the firm since its inception.**  
■

## What makes Paul, Weiss unique?

Our culture and the quality of our work. We all feel fortunate to be part of a firm where we have the opportunity to work on fascinating, high-profile matters involving cutting-edge issues for some of the world's most important and sophisticated clients. There is nothing better than working collaboratively with brilliant colleagues whom you respect and trust. I believe our clients appreciate that we operate as a true partnership with a strong sense

of collegiality and it helps drive results.

In addition, Paul, Weiss strongly believes in the importance of pro bono work and public service, and the value of diversity.

## Is your client expertise and focus strictly on the larger firms or is it broader?

The majority of my clients include some of the largest publicly and privately held corporations, market leading investment funds, and financial institutions, but Paul, Weiss also has a long tradition of serving innovative companies and entrepreneurs through their growth to becoming industry players. Some of the cases I try aren't necessarily large in and of themselves, but they can be hugely significant in solving a client's problem or helping them avoid a potential issue down the road.

## Have the issues you deal with become more complex?

No. I am a trial lawyer and, in my experience, there are only about seven recurring story lines that we regularly handle; most of the problems I encounter are related to one of them.

The stakes seem higher today because billions of dollars might be at issue, but back in the day, everyone still felt the same intensity. What is different today is the technology, and the ability to communicate and get information quickly.

## Do young people coming in need business experience as well as expertise in the law to handle matters today?

Many more of our young lawyers have work experience between college and law school, which gives them a better understanding of clients' needs and problems, but it's not essential. Our job as partners is to teach them that. I didn't move in-house until I was

■  
**There is nothing better than working collaboratively with brilliant colleagues whom you respect and trust.**  
■

in my 40s so I learned how business works and what lawyers in-house are responsible for, and the breadth of their challenges.

I believe that people skills are equally important. Some of the best and brightest law students are attracted to Paul, Weiss, and our challenge is to maintain their enthusiasm and creativity while honing their issue-spotting and problem-solving abilities. Being a trial lawyer requires an understanding of people and what motivates them. You have to convince a jury or a judge of your position with both reason and emotion since decision-makers, either consciously or unconsciously, use both of these faculties when weighing the evidence.

## What has made the pro bono component such a key focus for you at the firm?

I served in the government for a long time and I came from a family that was involved in public service. But what is impressive about Paul, Weiss is that pro bono and public service have been central tenets of the firm since its inception and these values are reinforced throughout one's career.

As soon as they arrive, associates are encouraged to get involved in pro bono work, which provides an opportunity for them to gain real world courtroom skills under the watchful eye of a senior partner. It is a great way for them to use their training to benefit those in need who could not otherwise afford a Paul, Weiss lawyer. ●