

The Business of Law

An Interview with Ernest LaMont Greer,
Vice President, Atlanta Managing Shareholder, Greenberg Traurig, LLP



Ernest LaMont Greer

EDITORS' NOTE Ernest LaMont Greer is a seasoned commercial litigator with wide-ranging trial experience representing clients in multimillion-dollar complex litigation and also serves on the firm's Executive Committee. He earned his J.D. from Northwestern University School of Law and his A.B. in Government from Harvard University.

What is the secret of the firm's success?

The secret is a management approach focused on supporting lawyers, where our goal is helping them to build their practices and give back to the community. It's not a firm where lawyers are tasked with meeting the goals of management. As firm leaders, we work for our lawyers. We are always eager to determine how we can make the practice of law better, more efficient, more practical, and more successful for our fellow partners.

How close is the coordination among offices to ensure that the service is seamless and how have you maintained an intimate, entrepreneurial culture within the firm?

Our model is built on the success of collaboration. To make that work, we focus on creating opportunities for partners to get to know each other one on one, and not just over e-mail or the telephone. We invest in bringing together our attorneys throughout the year to meet one another and socialize together. That personal interaction breaks down walls and makes the partnership feel much smaller. As the firm has grown, this strategy has remained a priority to ensure that our entrepreneurial culture thrives.

In Atlanta, we have grown to 100 attorneys and we spend a great deal of time meeting other lawyers across the firm. While we recognize that every market is different, we understand the importance of sharing core values across geographic boundaries. These values include a commitment to excellence; the concept of doing unto others as you would want others to do to you; and sharing information about particular clients (both current and prospective) in our various markets.

By operating as one coordinated firm, we are able to serve clients in a seamless manner from across our 37 offices in the U.S., Latin America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

Are large multinational companies the ideal clientele for the firm or is the practice broader?

Our platform is designed to meet the needs of a wide variety of companies. We started in 1967 with three people who were focused on real estate, corporate, and land use, so our DNA is based on our entrepreneurial roots. Throughout the years, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to meeting the needs of entrepreneurial clients. At the same time, as we have gotten larger, we've also made a strong foray into the Fortune 500.

What also makes us unique as a firm is that, in addition to serving a broad array of corporate clients, we also continue to serve a number of government clients at the local, state, and national levels.

Has the practice of law become more complex?

The legal industry has changed dramatically. Law firms have grown so large that they have to operate as sophisticated businesses rather than the old model of a simple partnership. In a very real sense, a lawyer is a businessman who happens to oversee the delivery of legal services.

In addition, clients are more sophisticated today and require more business advice regarding the handling of legal matters. When we handle a case, it is not just an internal process – it's a close collaboration with our clients. Clients are demanding very creative and business-focused solutions to resolve cases because they understand the financial impact when cases are long and drawn out. It is our goal to exceed those expectations and serve as trusted business advisers to our clients. ●

Connecting with Clients

An Interview with Nancy A. Mitchell,
Regional Operating Shareholder, Greenberg Traurig, LLP



Nancy A. Mitchell

EDITORS' NOTE Nancy Mitchell is also Co-Managing Shareholder of the New York office, and Co-Chair of the Business Reorganization & Financial Restructuring Practice for Greenberg Traurig. Prior to joining the firm, she served as an Executive Director for CIBC World Markets Corp. She was previously a partner with a major law firm where she focused her practice on restructuring and bankruptcy, and corporate finance.

Culturally, what has made this firm so successful?

It has always been the firm's emphasis on collaborative practices. In an industry that is very personality driven and where people tend to be very protective of their client relationships, our firm has managed to create a structure whereby people feel really comfortable sharing those relationships and their expertise. They collaborate with each other to build a strong platform, and that's the first thing that jumps out at me when I think about our firm relative to others. When I talk to recruits, I hear that there is a lot of struggle at other firms over things like origination credit, which is a conversation that just doesn't come up here. It's all about creating a greater whole.

Would you give an overview of the business reorganization and financial restructuring component?

From our perspective, our business reorganization practice is a bit different than that of our competitors because it serves two functions: one is to undertake great cases that we create. We've done a very good job at that.

The other function is the day-to-day service of the needs of our client base in connection with the issues they may experience in the business reorganization area. This means that we have a much broader practice than many of our competitors in terms of the kinds of things we are able to do.

We can be in the middle of a billion-dollar restructuring deal while also representing a lender or client in a middle market deal, as well as conducting proofs of claim for clients that have had suppliers go bankrupt.

We have a very broad practice with middle-market and larger clients in all positions in the cases in the mix. That is reflective of our client base across the country.

When you're dealing with clients at what is often a scary time for them, how do you foster a relationship that instills their confidence in you?

The hardest thing about being a restructuring lawyer is that you often see people at the lowest point in their professional lives. Connecting with those people and helping them understand that I'm not just their lawyer but someone who will help them get through this creates a very personal relationship and connection.

The best restructuring lawyers are those who connect with their clients and really care about their problems, but who don't become so involved that they lose objectivity.

What advice do you give women about the kind of career this industry can offer?

I never felt disadvantaged by being a woman. I have had spectacular mentors throughout my career who were men and who have advanced my career and been great to me. What I know to be true here is that we have a level playing field. One has to be smart and focused, and not let anything get in the way of doing the best for the client every day. If someone does that, the opportunities are there, no matter who that person is. ●