

# A Global Platform

**An Interview with Michèle Penzer,  
New York Office Managing Partner, Latham & Watkins LLP**

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Michèle Penzer is also a member of the firm's Finance Department and the Banking and Project Finance Practices. Penzer has held multiple leadership roles, including as a former global Co-Chair of the Banking Practice, former member of the firm's Executive Committee, and former Chair of the firm's Diversity Committee and Associates Committee.*



Michèle Penzer

**FIRM BRIEF** *Latham & Watkins (lw.com) is a global law firm with more than 2,400 lawyers in its offices located in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and the United States, including: Barcelona, Beijing, Boston, Brussels, Century City, Chicago, Dubai, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Hong Kong, Houston, London, Los Angeles, Madrid, Milan, Moscow, Munich, New York, Orange County, Paris, Riyadh, Rome, San Diego, San Francisco, Seoul, Shanghai, Silicon Valley, Singapore, Tokyo, and Washington, D.C.*

**What have been the keys to Latham & Watkins' consistent strength in the industry?**

Latham has invested in building a formidable global platform of offices in the world's major financial, business, and regulatory centers. Our one-firm culture values responsiveness, collaboration, and a client-first approach.

The firm continues to invest strategically in New York and other markets to stay relevant to the evolving needs of our clients and capitalize on opportunities in an increasingly interconnected global economy. Our sweet spot is complex, multi-jurisdictional, and interdisciplinary work. The globalization of business and increase in the number of cross-border matters, coupled with the influence of U.S. deal structures and the extraterritoriality of U.S. regulatory models, plays to our strengths. Clients rely on us for their most complicated, sophisticated matters.

**How do you define Latham & Watkins' culture?**

We are truly a "one-firm firm." This means no profit centers and no headquarters. We rely on consensus-based management and decision-making, with firm leaders spread throughout the world. Our global platform is comprised of a single, integrated partnership focused on providing the most collaborative approach to client service.

Latham emphasizes diversity and inclusion, because we know firsthand that diverse teams produce the most innovative "out-of-the box" solutions.

Other key firm values include teamwork, character, and excellence.

Pro bono work is another crucial aspect of our firm culture: 92 percent of Latham lawyers worked on pro bono matters last year, in nearly every area of public interest law. We encourage our lawyers to work on pro bono matters of particular interest to them.

**Would you provide an overview of Latham & Watkins' position in the New York market?**

New York is the largest Latham office – home to 475 lawyers, including some of the most well regarded lawyers in the world. We are consistently top-ranked in practice areas such as capital markets, M&A and private equity, and banking. Our New York office has a phenomenally strong financial institutions client base that includes the Who's Who of Wall Street. We have excellent and expanding talent working with clients on a wide array of complex litigation, public company representation, cyber security, financial regulatory, and fintech matters as well.

**Latham & Watkins places a major emphasis on building a diverse and inclusive workforce. Would you discuss these efforts?**

Our lawyers and professional staff comprise a mix of ethnicities, races, religions, sexual orientations, cultures, and primary languages. They come from an array of backgrounds with different experiences and perspectives. This diversity makes us who we are, and we are committed to recruiting the best and the brightest legal talent in the world. Latham's Diversity Leadership Committee (DLC) is responsible for spearheading the firm's diversity and inclusion strategy. Comprised of partners, counsel, and associates from around the firm, the DLC ensures that the critical goal of enhancing diversity in our hiring, mentoring, promotion, and leadership is at the forefront of the firm's decision-making and actions at all levels.

Notably, our Chair and Managing Partner, Bill Voge, recently signed onto the CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion, a coalition of more than 250 CEOs from a range of corporations, financial institutions, and professional service firms across industries. It is the largest CEO-driven business commitment to advancing diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

**What is the mission of Women Enriching Business (WEB) that you helped create at the firm?**

The firm's WEB Committee seeks to support and promote women in business, both inside and outside the firm, through global and local efforts designed to create networks and productive business

relationships, to attract top talent, and to support the long-term success of women. Each year, WEB hosts more than 60 events around the world, bringing together Latham lawyers, current clients, and prospective clients.

In celebration of WEB's 10th anniversary last year, we hosted a series of events focused on women in corporate boardrooms. Women directors from esteemed public, private, and nonprofit boards shared their perspectives on topics such as the advancement of women onto boards, board preparedness, and the impact of diverse voices in the boardroom.

**Would you elaborate on Latham & Watkins' commitment to pro bono work?**

Pro bono is a core part of our firm's culture. We believe that the practice of law includes the unique ability and responsibility to advocate for equal justice and provide needed representation to persons of limited means.

Latham is one of the largest providers of pro bono legal services in the world. Between 2000 and 2016, Latham provided approximately three million hours of free legal services to underserved individuals and families and the nonprofit sector valued at approximately \$1.3 billion. As mentioned, more than 90 percent of our lawyers around the world worked on pro bono matters last year.

We handle matters in nearly every area of public interest law, including veterans' rights, asylum and immigration, domestic violence, Holocaust reparations, anti-human trafficking, prisoners' rights, micro-finance, and civil rights. Clients include low-income individuals and nonprofit organizations without the means to pay.

**What advice do you give to young people interested in building a career in law?**

Law is a fantastic career and naturally draws goal-oriented people, but the path to a particular practice, firm, or company isn't always a straight line. Keeping an open mind and taking time to explore options is really important.

When I first joined Latham & Watkins, I took full advantage of the firm's Unassigned Associate Program. The program allowed me to explore a number of practices during my first couple of years at the firm rather than choosing a single practice right out of law school.

The exposure to a variety of practices helped me to learn the importance of being nimble and gave me the chance to see business needs from many legal perspectives. Ultimately, after sampling a number of practices, I chose to become a finance lawyer, which has proven to be a great fit for me and a very fulfilling career choice. ●