

Legal Week

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Dealmaker | Louise Roman Bernstein

The Dechert partner on the appeal of the wig, balancing work and family, and escaping Dewey



Why did you become a lawyer? When I was 11 years old, I made my first trip to England with my family and we had dinner with a long-time family friend, whose son-in-law was a barrister. When he let me wear his wig, that sealed my career ambitions. Of course, I'm glad now that I can practise here without the wig!

Who has been the biggest influence on your career? Camille Aousleiman. He introduced me to the world of emerging markets and made me a business-minded lawyer with an appreciation not only for the letter of the law, but also for the practical realities of doing business in

developing economies. He is my mentor in every respect.

What's your proudest professional moment? Receiving a personal request from the Prime Minister of Georgia to open an office in Tbilisi.

Worst day on the job? The hardest aspect of my job has been finding the right balance as a working mother. I have an iron-clad rule that I will always be interrupted if either of my kids call – with mixed results. On one occasion, I had to jump on and off a conference call with 20 people to deal with a stranded 10-year-old on his way to a playdate with my son. The crisis was resolved only to

have to break off again when my second son called to ask if he could have a second bag of crisps...

Strongest characteristic and worst trait? My strong point is efficiency. My worst trait is impatience.

Which lawyer do you most admire? Atticus Finch from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. He was a lawyer with strong moral principles who promoted social fairness and made a real difference to people's lives.

What advice would you give to young deal lawyers starting out? Draw lines. Our profession is demanding, both in the amount of intellectual energy and the amount of time it requires.

It is possible, however, to balance a strong professional commitment with a rewarding family life if you set clear priorities – and sacrifice a bit of sleep.

Best part of your job? Delivering on promises to clients that seem undoable at the outset.

What's the toughest ethical/moral dilemma your job has ever presented you with? Leaving Dewey & LeBoeuf

on the brink of collapse. Balancing the need to protect my own career and move on against Dewey's need to have its partners continue to support a plan to save the firm was extremely difficult. In retrospect, we might have left sooner, but it did not feel right walking away too soon from the sinking ship.

What most annoys you about the legal profession? Keeping time entries. I have always believed that the use of hourly rates as a measure for the value of legal services is misplaced as it penalises lawyers for being efficient.

Worst corporate event you attended? I find most events requiring lots of small talk and self-promotion dire.

Do you see yourself having a career outside law? I have always wanted to write a children's book or a novel. I still haven't given up the dream.

Favourite item of clothing? My son's university sweatshirt, which he presented to me as a thank you token when he graduated.

Favourite cheese? Any kind of goat's cheese, so long as it doesn't have anything blue or green growing in it.

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