

How I Made Firm Managing Partner: 'Strive to Be a Strong and Influential Mentor,' Says Sara Jane Shanahan of Sherin and Lodgen

"As the mother of two daughters, I am proud to have set an example of striving for excellence at work and remaining present and engaged in the daily lives of my kids."

By Tasha Norman

Sara Jane Shanahan, 52, Sherin and Lodgen, Boston.

Job Title: Managing Partner

Practice Area: Litigation. Prior to becoming managing partner, I served as chair of the firm's Litigation Department, and as a litigator, my practice focuses on complex business litigation and insurance coverage disputes.

Law school and year of graduation: Harvard Law School, J.D., *cum laude*, 1994.

How long have you been at the firm? I have been with Sherin and Lodgen for 13 years. I joined the firm in 2008 as a litigation partner and served as chair of the firm's Litigation Department from 2015 to Nov. 1, 2021, when I assumed the managing partner role.

Were you a partner at another firm before joining your present firm? Prior to Sherin, I was of counsel and a partner at Griesinger, Tighe & Maffei from 2002 – 2008. Before that, I was an associate and junior partner at Hale and Dorr from 1995 -2002.

Was your career goal to reach the leadership levels at a law firm? It has always been my career goal to work on interesting and complex litigation matters for business clients. But, I also realized early in my career that a law firm is a business, and in order to provide the high level of service we aim to deliver to clients, it is important for our firm to be stable and well managed.

For lawyers who enjoy the practice of law and having control over their day-to-day and long-term opportunities, it's important to take an interest



(Courtesy photo)

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in law firm operations and management, which will help them provide stable and sound services as well as better advice to their clients.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to your leadership role? As a young lawyer, I was fortunate to work with Jerry Facher, senior

litigation partner at Hale and Dorr. Jerry trained generations of trial lawyers, and I served as his law clerk for the in-house mock trial program. This meant that I spent significant time with Jerry and other partners at the firm and was drilled on critical trial skills – forming a question, listening to a question, objecting to a question. Jerry also taught us to “read the documents, read the documents, read the documents.” Jerry shared with me a love of the law and a desire to keep practicing no matter what obstacles or setbacks present themselves.

Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to yourself?

My advice to a younger self would be simply to stick with it. The practice of law is a marathon, not a sprint. There will be ups and downs, good days and less-good days, but working in a law firm gives one an opportunity to meet a wide variety of people, work on ever-evolving legal and business issues, use your skills to better your community through pro bono client work and other volunteer opportunities and apply the lessons learned from one problem to help resolve a host of future problems. The richness



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of the work is worth the sometimes rough and tumble nature of your interactions with other parties and lawyers. And, if you are fortunate to work in a great city like Boston, over the years you will develop a network of contacts with whom you enjoy working – whether you are working together on the same side of a case or on opposite sides, on nonprofit boards or through bar association and other community-based activities.

What’s an accomplishment that you are proudest of? I am proud of the fact that I have a leadership role at the firm and a thriving law practice, but I have also been able to balance work with my family life and my community activities. As the mother of

two daughters, I am proud to have set an example of striving for excellence at work and remaining present and engaged in the daily lives of my kids.

What’s the one characteristic that you believe every firm leader should possess? I believe that every firm leader should strive to be a strong and influential mentor. I am very fortunate to have benefited from very strong mentors—including Jerry Facher, Judge Gorton and Tom Maffei. For much of my career, I have endeavored to pay-it-forward by training junior lawyers with whom I have worked. I try to teach the same commitment to rigor, craftsmanship and excellence that my mentors instilled in me.