

How I Made Practice Group Chair: 'Be a Culture Carrier and Reinforce the Values of Your Firm,' Says Audra Cohen of Sullivan & Cromwell

By Tasha Norman

Audra Cohen, Sullivan & Cromwell, New York

Job title: Co-managing partner, General Practice Group.

Practice area: General practice—mergers and acquisitions; corporate governance.

Law school and year of graduation: The George Washington University Law School, 1992.

How long have you been at the firm? I joined Sullivan & Cromwell in 1993.

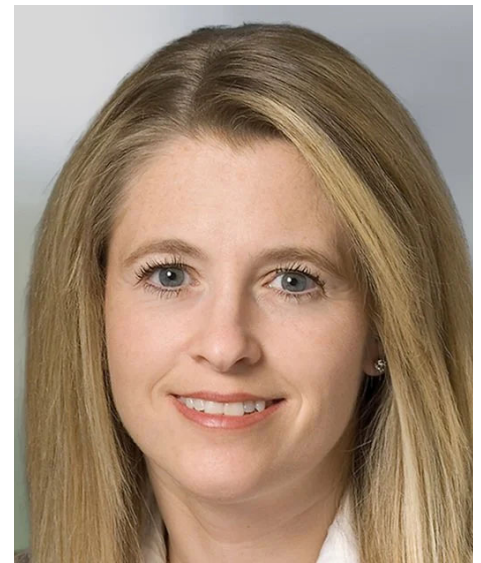
What year were you promoted to your current role and how long were you a partner at the firm before being promoted to your current role? I became co-managing partner of S&C's General Practice Group in February 2019 after 15 years as a partner. The General Practice Group is the largest at the firm. The group includes nearly 500 lawyers in transactional and advisory practice areas, such as M&A, financial services, capital markets, finance and restructuring, commercial real estate, intellectual property transactions, and executive compensation and benefits, and handles many of the most

significant and complex transactions around the world.

Were you a partner at another firm before joining your present firm? Like most of our partners, I have essentially spent my entire career here.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm to appoint you to your current role? Although I can't say exactly why I was appointed, I was honored to take on this role because I have so much respect for the other partners who have held the position.

Like many of my predecessors, I've held other leadership roles within the firm. I've also led major M&A and other matters, which required managing multipart deal teams across jurisdictions to help clients solve complex legal and business challenges. I co-founded and co-chaired the Women's Initiative Committee, which supports the firm's ongoing efforts to recruit, retain, and advance women lawyers. I also was a co-head of the Associate Experience Committee and served as the associate devel-



Audra Cohen, a partner with Sullivan & Cromwell.
(Courtesy photo)

opment partner for the M&A Group. A common thread in all these roles—and something very important to me—is the focus on lawyers' growth, which continues to guide me in my role as co-chair of the General Practice Group.

What's the key to successful business development in your opinion? Developing relationships is key. Beyond executing at a high level, it's important to make personal connections and maintain a dialogue with clients to understand their businesses inside and out. If they are a client

today, they could be again in the future, whether in their current job or elsewhere. At the same time, M&A lawyers need to be a constructive force on transactions and part of that is building relationships with other advisers and stakeholders who could become clients down the line. Maintaining those connections can help to expand your network exponentially.

Who had the greatest influence on your career and helped propel you to your current role? Three senior M&A partners come to mind: Jim Morphy, Joe Frumkin, and Frank Aquila. All have served as managing partners of S&C's M&A Group and have been tremendous leaders at the firm. They supported me throughout my career, showed me how to be a top-notch lawyer, and helped make me a better leader.

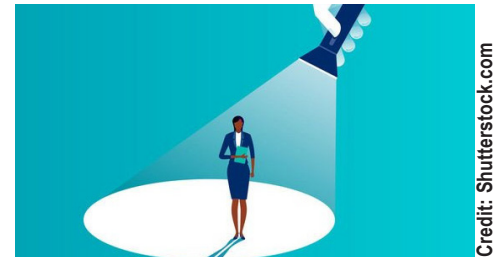
I've been lucky to work on major matters with all three. Each led complex deal teams in a masterful way, providing top-tier legal service and transactional strategy for our clients while also taking the time to teach and guide those who would come after them. Each instilled in me the importance of leading by example as well as the importance of the S&C culture: the collaborative way we work together as a firm.

Another individual who has been influential in my career is S&C Senior Chair Rodge Cohen. He led the firm for many years when I was an associate and a junior partner and he fostered a culture that celebrated different paths to success. That really made an impression on me.

Finally, I owe so much to my peers whom I've known since I began my career at S&C. We've had a unique opportunity to develop together as lawyers, challenging each other to be our best in a cohesive, inclusive, and collaborative environment. Most S&C partners have been with the firm their entire careers, which means we really get to know and value one another as colleagues and friends.

What's the best piece of advice you could give to a partner who is interested in leading a practice group? Be a good listener, both up and down. Be team-oriented. Be a culture-carrier and reinforce the values of your firm. And make sure to not only foster new ideas, but help bring them to fruition.

Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to your younger self? I would tell my younger self to consistently carve out time to build and maintain client and professional



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relationships. I have met a lot of interesting and talented people who have become close friends.

What three words, phrases, goals or mantras would you use to describe your work mindset? First and foremost: Say yes to opportunities, even outside of your comfort zone. Second: Take initiative and be proactive to achieve your goals. And third: Always look for ways to help. Be a positive force.

What firm initiatives are you working on and what impact do you hope to achieve? I continue to look for ways to set the next generation of lawyers up for success. Establishing the firm's Women's Initiative Committee, being a member of S&C's Diversity Committee and serving as a mentor to lawyers across the firm have been incredibly rewarding in that regard. I know from personal experience that managing a career and a family can be a delicate balance, and I hope that the support that S&C provides to our lawyers helps them with that balance so that they can become law firm leaders.