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An Interview with Madeleine M. McDonough

by Patricia J. Trombetta



Madeleine McDonough is a partner in the Washington D.C. office of Shook, Hardy & Bacon focusing on products regulated by the Food and Drug Administration, including drugs, medical devices, vaccines, biologics, food, beverages, and cosmetics. She brought a wealth of knowledge to the firm as a summer intern in the Kansas City office, twenty-five years ago, having been a clinical pharmacist in large teaching hospitals before obtaining her law degree. She made a home at Shook Hardy as a new lawyer and now chairs the Pharmaceutical & Medical Device Litigation Division and co-chairs the Agribusiness & Food Safety Practice and the Life Sciences & Biotechnology Practice at the firm. Madeleine also serves on the Executive Committee of the firm and heads up civic, diversity, pro bono, training, and client development activities. However, this is only a snapshot of what she does at Shook Hardy where she works across divisions, practice groups, offices, and taps a wealth of expertise to service her clients and those of others in her firm. She has also been recognized outside of her firm, being named a leading product liability attorney by *Who's Who Legal: The International Who's Who of Business Lawyers* and as a Life Sciences Star by *LMG Life Sciences*. She was named Mentor of the Year in 2013 by *Missouri Lawyer's Weekly* and is a frequent author and speaker on current topics relevant to her areas of expertise. In 2012, she went back to school and received an LLM in Global Health Law at Georgetown University Law Center in Washington D.C. to add to her already long list of accomplishments in the legal profession.

Who would you credit with mentoring you on the path to becoming the lawyer you are today?

There are so many people that have provided me with guidance and insight into the practice of law. I would have to say that every single person I have ever worked with or for has taught me something, but a few people stand out from the rest. Both of my parents went to law school in the 40's and although my mother, who just passed away at the age of 91, never practiced law, she always maintained her interest in the law and the profession and it was a part of our regular family conversations. My mother gave me not only that interest in the law but, the value of hard work. She worked as a teacher while raising eight children. When I decided to take the path to law school, I wanted to combine my background in pharmacology with the law and looked for a firm where that was possible. A woman on the hiring committee at Shook Hardy then, Marie Woodbury, was very smart, and she had a high intellectual curiosity that was infectious. She could get you intrigued with the intellectual aspect of any case. I am proud to say I have worked with her for twenty-five years, and she is still an influence on my legal life today and a good friend. Another great friend of mine at the firm, Leo Dreyer, heads up our R&D Emerging Legal Trends group. He has been an incredible resource and inspiration for thinking ahead, anticipating issues, and tapping the resources among and across practice groups to assist clients. There have been many more people who have had an impact on my development along the way but these people stand out for their different roles in my development as a lawyer.

How do you take the mentoring you have received and play it forward?



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Upcoming Seminar

I try to provide advice to clients that they cannot find anywhere else. I encourage teams to go the extra mile for a client. To “wow” them, and really deliver. I try to give them assignments that might be just beyond what a more junior lawyer might currently be handling, to get them to stretch and think beyond what they had done in the past, or to extrapolate from that which they have done before to a new set of facts or issues and apply it in a new and different way. It may seem a bit daunting to them, but it is in reality just the next step and they are invariably ready for it -- they just may not have known that. I have confidence in them and hopefully that translates into their internalizing that confidence. I try to think a step or two ahead of where they may feel comfortable and challenge them with more and deeper responsibility. It is a powerful and great gift to be able to watch people take the next step, knowing that others have done that for me in the past. I am absolutely standing on many shoulders at Shook Hardy, and I try to lend a shoulder in return, wherever I can.

How would you define and apply rainmaking in the context of your career?

I do not dispute that the importance of doing a good job, building relationships, and putting your name out there are key components to rainmaking, but I would have to say it is not just doing a good job, it is doing a *great* job. There is a lot of competition; there are a lot of really good lawyers in the field, so clients have many choices. You have to differentiate yourself, have the right expertise, find the right expertise within or outside your firm, and have a passion for what you are doing. It is like most other important relationships in your life -- you can check the box and be good at what you do, or because you really want to connect with that client, you give a little something extra for them. I want to be somebody that can help a client solve a problem in a way that makes their life easier or better. I believe in bringing value to the client by connecting the dots between what they think their current question is and really solving their problem, and perhaps helping them in a larger way with their overall strategic needs. Clients do not want lawyers to spend huge amounts of time on a problem. What they really want is some creative thinking that will solve the problem as soon as it can be solved, in a way that advances their greater needs. You need to align yourself with the desire of the client to focus on the goal and the solution rather than the billable hour metric that many firms get caught up in. Do great work and become indispensable, and you will not need to focus on billable hours.

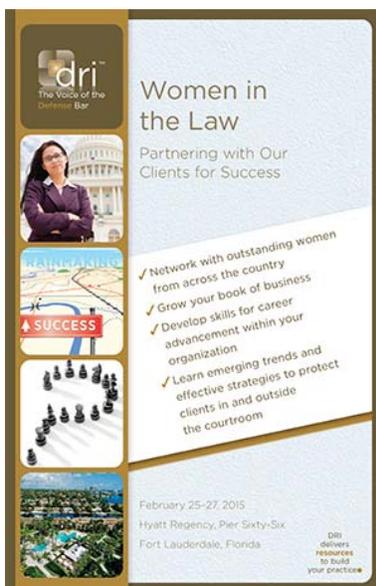
Are there ever any failures in rainmaking efforts?

I may be dispirited at times, but when I look back, I recognize such times as gifts. They may have helped me remember to listen to a client a bit closer or to understand the bigger picture. You learn so much from anything that does not cause immediate success that it is really just a part of the process. I think of it as just a step along the way and try to make something positive out of it. For example, you might give a presentation, and no one may come up to you afterward to follow up or discuss it with you. That is fine, as you likely learned a lot in preparing for the presentation, hearing other presenters, but you also do not know what building blocks you are putting down or how the results of that presentation may show up years from now. I have had people call me weeks or months or years after a presentation asking for legal counsel. They did not forget whatever the message was, but they just didn't need help at that particular moment. Sometimes when you are doing things that are challenging, that take time and energy, if you stop and try to enjoy the process, you may recognize that you are growing and learning even if it does not result in some immediate success. That is its own reward.



Patricia J. Trombetta authored this article.

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