



Tipping the Scales



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Traci Lovitt: “Coming to a Clear Vision Is Something No One Should Delegate”



Traci Lovitt is the Partner-in-Charge of Jones Day’s Boston office. She has argued before the U.S. Supreme Court and authored briefs raising significant issues for every level of the federal and state judiciaries. Traci is regularly involved in high-profile matters, including for IBM, Yamaha and Exxon-Mobil. She was a member of the brief writing team that successfully represented Sherwin-Williams in the landmark public nuisance action before the Rhode Island Supreme Court. She also served as primary brief writer in *The Sherwin-Williams Company v. Holmes County*, a novel and successful declaratory action against Mississippi counties.

1. If you were to pinpoint the single most crucial leadership skill that has helped you as the Partner in Charge of Jones Day Boston, what would it be? Why?

It has been the combination of a few things: conviction, clear direction, and communication. Because Jones Day was entering the Boston legal market for the first time, I needed to have a clear vision of what we were trying to accomplish and hold fast to it. I also had to articulate that vision and purpose to existing clients, potential clients, and to potential lateral partners and associates so the community could understand why Jones Day was opening in Boston and how we are different.

In the case of opening the Boston office, formulating that kind of vision took work! Before the Firm decided to open, I studied in depth the Boston legal market and business community, interviewed 20-30 local general counsels, spoke with the practice and other office leadership within Jones Day, and even met with potential laterals. I came at the issue like client work, like a legal problem, and took a very thorough, analytical approach to it. The work made it incredibly clear that Jones Day should be in Boston. It became fairly obvious that the Firm's unique practice offerings, international coverage, and talent could benefit Boston, and that Boston had a lot of talented lawyers and fantastic businesses that could partner well with Jones Day. Understanding how and why we should open was a very hands-on process for me. Delegation is an important skill and something a leader must do, but sometimes good leadership requires getting into the trenches. Coming to a clear vision is something no one should delegate.

2. You have worked on brief writing teams, including as the primary writer, in several high-profile cases; how do you manage these teams to produce the best results?

First you have to know your people – you really have to know your partners and associates and where their skills lie, particularly on high-profile matters. If the work involves a novel preemption question, my job as the briefing team leader is to staff the team with those individuals who have a strong preemption background, as well as forward-looking thinkers and great writers. Second, you must constantly think about the client and the client's interests. Nine times out of ten, a client has me working on a matter because it wants to ensure the best arguments are developed and preserved, with an eye towards the Supreme Court. You have to think about legal strategy far in advance, "What are we going to do at the Supreme Court if this case has to go that far?"

On this point, Jones Day prides itself on having offices without borders. Even as the office leader, I don't work exclusively with people in the Boston office. We staff projects with the best people for the job regardless of location, which can mean looking at the international roster. We're not limited by location but by skill sets, matching the best skills to the project. Again, you *really* have to know your people! If you don't know your partners and talk amongst yourselves, then you can't manage projects well. Part of the expectation of the Firm is that each partner understands our own strengths and weaknesses as a Firm.

3. How do you help preserve Jones Day's firm culture within the Boston office?

We have an extremely strong firm culture that is very value laden. To distill it to 2 points: we always work for the best interest of the client, and the partners truly act like members of a partnership – we treat each other and our associates with respect, and are always *all* looking out for the client. It is important for the Firm to maintain that culture not only in Boston, but in any new office. We purposefully opened the Boston office with partners who transferred from other offices. This was both for business

reasons — the partners had good client relationships here or skills that were suitable to the market — and to have some “culture police” — people who brought with them the values of Jones Day, and who could help integrate new laterals and steep them in those values. It was a very conscious decision on the part of the Firm.

4. What can young lawyers getting started do at the beginning of their careers – i.e., what actions can they take or opportunities can they explore, etc. – that will pay off later down the line as they aim for leadership opportunities?

There’s an old quote from Charlie Munger to the effect of “the best way to get new business is to do great work on your current business.” This applies not only to client work, but to firm and administrative work: if you want to have more of a leadership role, or more of a managerial role, treat every single task you get that falls into those buckets like your most important client work. Early in my career, I was asked to critique the Firm’s website, and I treated the task like client work. I produced a paper on how to improve the design and search functions, and was subsequently asked to be on a committee to redesign the website, which was another task that I took incredibly seriously. A lot of times, lawyers view those kinds of administrative assignments as fluff work, and they don’t give it their all. But if you take the work seriously, you will be asked to do more of it. I would give this advice in every facet of law firm life – do your best on everything that comes across your desk.

For young attorneys who might be having trouble securing a job in private practice, I think government service is a great alternative. I would encourage 3Ls who are looking for a law firm job but cannot find one to look at the U.S. Attorney’s Office, the Department of Justice, the DA’s Office — all have really great positions that can get you on your feet with trial experience or appellate argument experience. Those are fantastic jobs. They can help segue lawyers back into private practice, too. Of course, some people start in government and love it so much they stay there. Also, getting a second degree is not a bad thing, like an L.L.M. in banking law or an accounting degree, to help distinguish yourself in the market. Increasingly, the legal services industry is becoming more specialized, because clients are more willing to pay for honed, specific skill sets.

5. Is there anything else about leadership that you would want to include?

This is a life lesson more than anything...it’s very important to always treat everyone with whom you’re working — whether it’s someone who is across the table, on the same side of the table, or waiting on the table — with respect and in exactly the way you want to be treated. It’s important not only to leadership, but to being a good person. If you want to set a good tone in the office, treating everyone up and down the line professionally, fairly, and with respect is very important.

Tipping the Scales is a blog by the Boston Bar Association.