

A Chance to Press Pause: Why One Latham Banking Partner Took a Five-Year Career Break, Then Returned

Latham & Watkins' co-chair of London finance spent seven years at Ropes & Gray before taking a step back from the industry to spend time with her family.

By Jack Womack

After seven years as a partner at Ropes & Gray in London, Tania Bedi took the decision in 2017 to step away from law in order to relocate overseas and take the time to raise a young family. Earlier this year, she returned to the industry, and joined Latham & Watkins as a partner in its banking practice and is currently co-chair of the firm's London finance department. Here she explains why she stepped away and what drew her back.

Why did you decide to take a career break?

I had reached a point where I liked law a lot, but I had no time for any other aspect of my life. My husband had a career opportunity overseas,

and we wanted the family to be together. People might have thought I was leaving law just because I was exhausted, but no, it was to spend time with my family and live overseas as a family together. I couldn't work overseas, and remote working was not as much of a thing [in 2017] as it is now.

Was it an easy decision to reach?

Law firms hire—and want to hire—people who are well-rounded, but then when you're there, you don't have much time to do anything else. I just wanted to press pause. And I did that. I enjoyed owning my time.

Did you miss law during your time away from the industry?

No, but I missed being me—the me who loved work and deals. It



Courtesy photo

Tania Bedi, Latham & Watkins.

was a natural decision to come back to work and I was always going to do that. This break was not part of a big plan—and I'm grateful that I've had the courage, and had good friends and colleagues who supported the decision. A pause, a little bit like two years of the pandemic, gives one perspective.

What was the reaction you had when you made the decision?

When I said to people I was going to walk away, people were like “wow”—I think it might have been a relief for the people who didn’t like me [laughs]. I’ve never taken a gap year, never had any pause. One person said it was courageous, but they saw that it was the right thing to do.

Do you think people’s attitudes to career breaks have changed since 2017?

I don’t think it’s changed since 2017. I was a trainee in 2001 and qualified in 2003—in those 19 years, there’s been a huge amount of change. Being a lawyer today is not a linear path: you’ve got to have the courage to know you have a choice, so you need to be sincere to yourself. The path doesn’t have to have to be what the last person in your office did.

Would you recommend taking time away from law to others?

My recommendation to other people is do what you need to do: do what is right for you, without making rushed decisions. We all want to have long careers, but people want to work to a different time scale. I think people now are open minded

to different ways of working provided you’re diligent.

What did you do while you were away?

I wrote a kids book for my children. But I didn’t seriously think about another career; I couldn’t think of myself as anything other than as a partner in a big law firm...

Why did you choose Latham when coming back to law?

When I knew I was coming back, it was an easy decision [to come to Latham]. The practice I’m in, it’s top tier. It was the right platform and the right choice to come here at this stage in my career. The amazing thing is that people are now open minded to different career paths. The move back to law just happened organically... Latham was the right platform.

Have your Latham colleagues been interested in your career break?

It’s always nice to be a new partner in the team. People have been very welcoming, and I certainly haven’t had any barriers put in my way as a result.

What was your favourite part of being away from law?

Not having a phone and constantly checking emails. You’re so used to checking emails in the middle of the night, when you’re on holiday, etc. I did not check my emails. Now you don’t even have the eight hours off when you’re flying as planes have Wi-Fi now... I miss having more control over my time, although there’s no profession out there where people don’t miss that.

Should career breaks be more widely available to lawyers?

I know people worry if there is a delay or a break in their career, but people are open to individual differences. The younger generation certainly aren’t shy to say what they want. But law has to remain a traditional hard working career—that can’t completely change. Slight variations must be possible, but you have to work alongside your clients. You have to be realistic and accept it’s a career with long hours and a lot of hard work. However the career path needn’t be linear— and that I don’t think people would have thought possible 30 years ago!