

DISTINGUISHED LEADERS



Michèle Penzer

**Managing partner,
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What are some of your proudest recent achievements?

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atham & Watkins has provided me so many extraordinary opportunities to impact my clients, the firm and the local community. In my finance practice,

I've been able to navigate the world's leading banks through some of the most volatile market conditions over the past two decades. I've also been incredibly honored to serve as New York Office Managing Partner since 2015. With more than 450 lawyers, New York is Latham's largest office. We have strategically grown several key practices, adding more than two dozen prominent lateral partners and counsel in the last three years alone. We also recently announced that we will be relocating to 1271 Avenue of the Americas, formerly known as the Time-Life Building. I'm delighted to help oversee this exciting, multi-year project, which reflects our growth and success in the world's largest legal market.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to support the firm's commitment to legal aid and pro bono in New York. Every year, our lawyers and professional staff take on matters in nearly every area of public interest law, including veterans' rights, asylum and immigration, and Holocaust reparations. Latham recently served as pro bono counsel to the Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform, which performed a high-profile analysis of the city's criminal justice system and Rikers Island. The new public policy that Rikers be closed will significantly impact the criminal justice system both locally and nationally.

Personally, I've been privileged to serve on the board of the New York Women's Foundation and help the organization improve the lives

of low-income women and girls in New York City.

What does it mean to be a leader? Strong leaders listen to different perspectives and work to build consensus. Leaders should be able to acknowledge mistakes and change course when needed. An effective leader understands that contribution can come in many different forms, often in new and unexpected ways.

Name a lawyer or mentor whose leadership inspired you. So many have inspired me, but I'm particularly grateful for the mentorship of Latham partner Dave Gordon. Since I joined Latham in 1993, he has taught me so much about being a good lawyer and manager. As a former Vice Chair of the firm and a former office managing partner of the New York office, his vision, drive, and dynamic leadership have been instrumental in shaping the firm's growth. I've always admired Dave's willingness to consider varying viewpoints, ability to anticipate and respond to market trends, and deep knowledge of the legal industry.

How are the business and profession of law changing, and how should lawyers

adapt for the future? Strategic planning, flexibility, and adaptability are critical.

Accordingly, Latham has invested in building a formidable global platform that can address clients' changing needs in an increasingly interconnected economy.

Clients want superior legal counsel, business-focused advice, and a flexible, nimble legal partner to help address business problems. Innovative technologies and new approaches to project management will be key. To better harness technology to serve our clients' needs, we are working with a leading artificial intelligence provider to expedite the due diligence process and to help transactional teams identify critical deal points for negotiations.

What is the best advice for someone considering a career in law, or someone already in the profession who is seeking to make a greater impact? You should take charge of your own career, rather than following any single prescribed path. Pursue work that you find challenging and interesting, and seek an environment where you can thrive. In particular, look for a place where you truly like your colleagues, feel happy and can envision your long-term growth.