

CHICAGO BUSINESS JOURNAL

WOMEN OF INFLUENCE

In profile: Cathy Birkeland

Name: Cathy Birkeland
Company: Latham & Watkins LLP
Title: Office Managing Partner
Born: Edina, Minnesota
Education:

Edina High School (1990); BA, cum laude, Dartmouth College (1991); JD, cum laude, Northwestern University School of Law (1997)

In my job, I'm responsible for:

Leading and setting strategy for the Chicago office of Latham & Watkins, as well as overseeing all of the administrative aspects of running a 190-lawyer office. As a corporate partner in the Capital Markets Practice Group, my practice focuses on representing clients in capital markets transactions, public company representation, corporate governance, and advising boards of directors on corporate matters.

The most challenging part of my job is:

Constantly juggling multiple balls in the air at one time, time management and effectively delegating.

A tip I've learned that's helped me with networking is:

Do things that are authentic to you.

The best advice I've received for career development is:

Your career is a marathon and you need to pace yourself for the long haul and make time for the things that are important to you and make you happy.

Do you serve as a mentor to someone? If so, how do you try to fill that role?:

I serve as a mentor for a number of associates at Latham. As a mentor, I strive to give associates opportunities to work on complex legal matters and help them develop their substantive legal expertise, introduce them to clients and integrate them into important client relationships, and help them think strategically about their career path and how to best go about achieving their career objectives.

Do you have a mentor yourself? If so, what do you look for from that person?:

I have been very fortunate to have

wonderful mentors throughout my career, and they have been instrumental in my career development. When I was a younger lawyer, I looked to them primarily for opportunities to work on transactions in my area of expertise, training to help me develop my substantive skillset, and in being my champion both inside and outside of the firm. Now that I am more senior, I turn to them for help in growing client relationships and developing new business, making difficult judgment calls, and guidance on strategic decisions. My parents have also served as life-long mentors to me in teaching me the importance of family and the things that matter most in life!

What's the best way to stay motivated and complete goals?:

Throughout my career I have been fortunate to participate in a number of different firm management roles that have allowed me to regularly take on new challenges and have changed the nature of my "day-to-day" job on a regular basis. This has helped keep things fresh and interesting after 20 years at the same firm! I am also a big list keeper, as it helps me stay well organized and motivated to accomplish my goals and cross things off the list.

Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give yourself 10 years ago?:

Be willing to take risks, as they often lead to the most rewarding opportunities.

What charity, foundation or cause do you regularly support or volunteer with?:

In 2003, my son, Ryan, was born with a life threatening heart defect and had open-heart surgery at Children's Memorial Hospital when he was seven days old. I will be forever grateful to the doctors and nurses at the hospital and have been an active supporter of The Heart Center at the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago ever since. I also serve on the Chicago Board of Camp Kesem, a national organization that supports children through and beyond their parent's cancer.

What's your favorite vacation spot?:

Our summer cabin, "Pinewoods," on



Big Sand Lake located in Park Rapids, Minnesota. It has been in our family for five generations.

What do you do to get rid of stress?:

I love to work out at Redefined Fitness in Wilmette (although I don't do it enough). One of my favorite stress relievers is skiing in the mountains with my family. I also love a good book!

What's something about you that would surprise your fellow Women of Influence honorees?:

The only other job I have had besides working at Latham is being a teaching tennis pro.

If you could have any five people (living or dead) over for dinner, whom would you invite?:

Pino Lella (an unsung WWI hero and whose life the novel Beneath a Scarlet Sky by Mark Sullivan is based off of); Warren Buffet; Jamie Wolf (a former ballet dancer with the New York City Ballet, jewelry designer and founder of Jamie Wolf jewelry; I would love to be an investor in her company!); Kate Middleton; My children, Campbell and Ryan.