

A LEGACY FIRM WELCOMES TOMORROW'S LAWYERS

*Chief Operating Partner Deb Boiarsky talks
Porter Wright in a post-pandemic world*

Q: TELL US ABOUT PORTER WRIGHT TODAY.

A: I like to think that Porter Wright today is a meaningful evolution of what Porter Wright has been for a century and a half. We are the counsel our clients turn to for high stakes litigation, for significant transactions, for sensitive employment matters. We guide our clients through things you might see in the news, but many things you never would. Our directory looks dramatically different than it used to, but the quality of service is just the same, and delivered in new ways. We build on our foundation, always toward better results for our clients.

Porter Wright Morris & Arthur LLP is not only Columbus's oldest law firm; it's central Ohio's oldest business. Founded in 1846, the firm remains rooted in its original values. But the world in 2023 is significantly different from what it was even five years ago. And as a legacy firm with a robust practice and offices in nine cities, Porter Wright must build its future in a rapidly shifting work environment.

In January 2020, the firm announced that Deb Boiarsky would become the first female chief operating partner in its history. An attorney who earned her J.D. from The Ohio State University, Boiarsky's practice focuses on employee benefits and executive compensation.

Since then, Porter Wright, like many firms, has considered what its future might hold, how to shift operations in a post-pandemic world, and how to balance day-to-day work with developing the associates who will become the legal profession's future leaders.

We sat down with Boiarsky to discuss those and other topics.

Q: CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE CULTURE PORTER WRIGHT IS BUILDING?

A: Bob Tannous (the firm's managing partner) and I continually emphasize a culture of collaboration. Collaboration, we have seen, offers the dual purpose of stronger client service and associate growth. Attorneys often function as entrepreneurs, even within a firm, and that is a wonderful thing. We want to encourage that. But it can also lead to an "I-me-mine" mindset, rather than a "we-us-ours" one. When we buy into what we can achieve collaboratively, the talent of our attorneys truly can be brought to bear for the benefit of our clients.

Q: HOW HAVE THE FIRM'S DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS SHIFTED SINCE JANUARY 2020, WHEN YOU TOOK THIS ROLE? THE WORLD IS A VASTLY DIFFERENT PLACE.

A: It really is. Practically speaking, we are working on efficiencies that are increasing the firm's capabilities in this new working world. Through the latest legal technologies, we're adding more automation and streamlining case management. This gives our experienced attorneys more time to do meaningful work that leans on their skill sets, knowledge and insights, and allows our new attorneys to hit the ground running.

Q: HOW DOES THE FIRM NAVIGATE THAT SHIFT AS A LEGACY INSTITUTION IN THE LEGAL INDUSTRY AND IN CENTRAL OHIO?

A: Our leadership team feels entrusted with that legacy, which stretches across our nine offices. Our decisions are not made in a vacuum. We collaborate with each of our offices, and each of our departments. Lawyers are opinionated — if you ask their thoughts, you will get them. But you also need to know when to make a choice. And for us, the choices come down to this: What is best for the firm and our clients? There is the best decision and the easiest one, and they are rarely the same thing. The key is engaging stakeholders in the process.

Q: HOW DOES THE FIRM MENTOR AND INTEGRATE YOUNG ASSOCIATES?

A: For each new matter, we look for ways to include our young associates in building and developing skilled and diverse teams. This not only builds trust between attorneys, it creates the opportunity for mentorship relationships with our younger associates, and ultimately, provides better service for our clients because it brings new ideas forward. We continually look for ways to build our associate training program, both formally and informally. What I hope our young associates see in our firm is that there are different pathways to success. The path does not have to be linear — and in fact, diverse paths can make our work product, and the firm, stronger.

