

How I Made Office Managing Partner: 'You Must Give Respect to Get Respect,' Says Aisha Bembry of Lewis Baach Kaufmann Middlemiss

By Tasha Norman

Aisha Bembry, Lewis Baach Kaufmann Middlemiss, Washington, D.C.

Job title: Managing partner.

Practice areas: Litigation, insurance, international disputes.

Law school and year of graduation: University of Pennsylvania Law School (2003).

How long have you been at the firm? I joined the firm in February 2006, nearly 17 years ago.

How long were you a partner at the firm? I was promoted to partner 11 years ago, in 2011.

What year were you promoted/elected to your current role at your current firm? I became the managing partner of the firm's Washington, D.C., office in April 2022.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in electing/promoting you to your current role? When faced with the decision of selecting a new managing partner, the partnership sought out a leader with a management style that aligns with Lewis Baach's culture. We are a small firm with a highly sophisticated international litigation practice; we work collegially in lean teams and place a premium on supporting our employees. The firm also wanted someone with experience organizing and managing

large cases and projects—as most of my partners would admit, that's not everyone's core strength. I believe I was chosen not only for my leadership experience on significant litigation of the firm, but also because of my commitment to people and my can-do, will-do attitude. Throughout my career, I have been a proponent of investing in people and have successfully managed numerous engagements of diverse teams across the breadth of the firm's work. I take pride in doing whatever it takes to get the job done, a characteristic that I believe has been highly valued.

What are your key responsibilities and what unique challenges do you face as it relates to your role? My key responsibilities include day-to-day oversight and management of the firm's employees, finances, and business relationships. Perhaps the most unique challenge I face in my role as managing partner is maintaining and promoting the firm culture in this new hybrid work environment. As a small firm in a pre-COVID world, we all knew each other quite well and there was extensive interaction, stopping to chat in the hallways, stepping into offices and sitting down for impromptu lunches and coffees. But a lot has



Aisha Bembry, Lewis Baach Kaufmann Middlemiss PLLC (Courtesy photo)

changed in the past few years and we, like many organizations, have faced the challenges of a global pandemic, transitioning to hybrid work schedules, and hiring new employees in a hybrid environment. Managing in a post-COVID world means interacting with people in different ways. Building relationships now just takes more time and must be done with more thoughtfulness and creativity than before.

What's the best piece of advice you give to someone who wants to rise up the ranks to lead an office? To anyone who wants to be a successful leader, I would offer the following piece of advice: treat

everyone with respect and know who you are. The first part of my advice is straightforward—in short, you must give respect to get respect. Over the past 20 years working at a law firm, including the three years I spent working in Big Law, I have come to appreciate that no one person is good at everything and no one person can do it all or should do it all. Law firms function best when everyone on the team understands and respects the various roles that each team member plays and is flexible and committed to the overall success and objective of the team. To be an effective leader you must show each member of your team respect to obtain the respect you need to be successful. It is also just as important to know who you are: to understand your strengths, weaknesses and limits. Also, make sure you play to your strengths, work on your challenges, and operate within your limits while still testing them. It is certainly good to be known as the go-to person for some things, but also give yourself grace when you face challenges, make mistakes, or when you just need time for yourself and your family. When people see someone who is respectful, competent, committed, and self-aware, it goes a long way in how you are valued.

Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to your current role? I've had many important people help me along the way in my career but the greatest influence in helping propel me to my current role as manag-

ing partner has been my partner, Mark Leimkuhler. I have worked with Mark for the majority of my career and tried multiple cases with him. I've learned a lot from observing his thoughtful and principled approach to problem-solving and from seeking his advice on countless matters, both big and small. Through the years we have worked together, Mark took the time to learn about me. He pushed me to be the best lawyer I could be, gave me the respect and opportunity to be the

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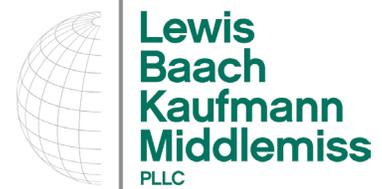
best working mother I could be, and showed me the skills necessary to be the best leader I could be. Mark has served as an excellent mentor throughout my nearly 17 years at the firm and assisted me greatly in gaining the skills necessary to succeed in my current role.

Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to your younger self ? The advice I would give my younger self is to take more risks; to believe in my ability to succeed, even in situations that make me uncomfortable. There were many times early in my career when I doubted myself and my abilities. As a result, I shied away from trying new things or stepping into new



roles. Thankfully, I work with colleagues who never doubted me or my capabilities and who worked to ensure that I would rise up the ranks and meet the moment.

What term would you use to describe your work mindset? Make it work! These three simple words have served me well in my life, especially when things are challenging. You are going to face curveballs, challenges, and disappointments at times during your career. You cannot let these things immobilize you or demotivate you. Expect them, face each challenge, and make it work the best way you can. If you have done your best at the end of the day, that is all you can ask of yourself.



Aisha Bembray
aisha.bembray@lbkmlaw.com
(202) 833-8900

Lewis Baach Kaufmann Middlemiss PLLC
Washington | New York | London
www.lbkmlaw.com