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Gretchen Blauvelt-Marquez

How Taekwondo Black Belt and Legal Career Are Alike

It takes focus and discipline to earn a black belt in Taekwondo. These skills are also helpful in maintaining a successful legal practice, according to Day Pitney Partner and Taekwondo black belt Gretchen Blauvelt-Marquez.

Gretchen began studying Taekwondo while in college and then became a teacher of the martial art. In Taekwondo, obtaining a black belt is not the end goal; it is the beginning of a practitioner's true learning—and teaching others is part of that learning. A legal career is the same, says Gretchen. "There are always new rules and regulations to learn," she acknowledges, "but what is more important is to learn clients' needs so that we can offer advice that helps them meet those needs."

Gretchen's legal career began at a large New York firm that allowed her to practice in a variety of different areas, including litigation, debt finance and tax. It was there that she began to focus on public company work, including capital markets transactions and Securities and Exchange Commission compliance. "It's a great mix of advisory and transactional work," Gretchen says. "We really get to know our clients and their businesses through advising them on their day-to-day public company disclosure obligations, as well as significant capital raising and financing transactions that may arise from time to time."

Building familiarity with her corporate clients' businesses is a meaningful—and necessary—part of her practice, she says. "If you understand the business and management's goals, you can give them practical advice that advances their business strategy," Gretchen adds.

The general counsel of a large, publicly traded semiconductor company who works with Gretchen describes her as "super intelligent and very thorough and thoughtful in her approach as well as with her advice." The client adds, "Gretchen is very clear in her communications and advice. She is very business-oriented; she doesn't just reiterate what the law says."

Gretchen joined Day Pitney in January 2020 because she knew it would offer her an opportunity to broaden her practice and become a more well-rounded corporate attorney and because she believed it was a place where she could have a long-term future. She was also drawn to the firm because she wanted to work closer to her New Jersey home—and her 5-year-old son.

Gretchen counsels publicly traded and privately held companies of all sizes. Whether she is working with a C-suite executive or in-house counsel, Gretchen focuses on building relationships. "If you get to know the individuals and their particular concerns and business goals, the advice you give is always better … and better received," she notes.

Gretchen credits her mentors at the firm with helping her develop her relationship-building skills. Her partners in the Public Companies, Securities and Capital Markets practice group involved Gretchen in client meetings and business development activities from the day she joined the firm. They also demonstrated the value of being a champion for your own team—a practice Gretchen mirrors with junior colleagues.

"It helps to get the clients familiar with the junior folks working on their matters and the great work they are doing," Gretchen says. "Involving young lawyers in client interactions creates an environment that gives associates the opportunity to thrive and brings out the best in our team. It also helps with continuity for the client, so they always know who is on their team as people advance."

Gretchen uses her legal skills to give back to her community by providing pro bono counsel to nonprofit clients on corporate formation, governance and contract matters. Outside her practice, Gretchen is a member of the PTA of her son's school and serves on a PTA committee that focuses on fostering equity in the school.

PUBLIC COMPANIES, SECURITIES AND CAPITAL MARKETS

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