

## How I Made It: 'I View My Role as the Point Guard for the Office—To Make Everyone Around Me Better,' Says Meshach Rhoades of Crowell & Moring

**"Be authentic, figure out what you do great and do that more, figure out what others do great and show them off and lift them up so they can do that more, too."**

By Tasha Norman

**Meshach Rhoades, 42, Crowell & Moring, Denver.**

**Job title:** Managing partner, Denver office.

**Practice area:** Litigation, regulatory.

**Law school and year of graduation:** University of Colorado, 2004.

**Were you a partner at another firm before joining your present firm?** I was an equity partner at another law firm for more than five years and also served as that firm's chief diversity officer and on its compensation committee. Prior to that, I was in-house at CenturyLink (formerly QWEST) managing litigation and regulatory work. I started my career clerking for the U.S. District Court in Colorado and served as an associate at the largest law firm in Denver.

**What year did you make office managing partner at your current firm?** 2021.

**What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you office managing partner?** We were launching a new office in Denver, and the firm wanted someone who could effectively lead but also lived Crowell's

values and would lead by example. Denver is a vibrant city, and we wanted to open our office with people who value this community and could blend their local knowledge and this firm's fantastic platform, while elevating our clients' experiences here. I also think the firm values my authenticity and my commitment to this community, this office, our clients and everyone that contributes to our Crowell experience. All of the attorneys and staff in the Denver office that work so hard for our clients know that each day I will give everything that I have to the post—and hopefully that allows each of them to bring their best selves, which I think produces better work product.

**As office managing partner, what are your key responsibilities, and what challenges do you face in your role?** My key responsibility is setting everyone up for success in our Denver office. If I can use a sports analogy, I view my role as the point guard for the office. I was a college basketball player—a point guard. My role was to make everyone around me better, to distribute the ball, to recognize peoples' strengths and put them in a position to build on those strengths while providing



Meshach Rhoades

Courtesy Photo

support to minimize weaknesses. The inherent challenge is that I have to know my team, understand their goals, and recognize their value. This cannot simply be a one-time meeting. This requires continual effort and strategic vision and determination.

I also have a responsibility at Crowell to build a strong reputation in the Denver market. They have entrusted me with leading the Crowell team and jumping into the market. I take that seriously. Our culture is critical to our success. Our community support is key to ensuring that we are a great community partner in the metro Denver region. As we continue to navigate this pandemic amidst a new and changing work environment, we need to continue to give

the people in our office the tools they need to continue providing excellent service to clients. We are also focused on continuing to grow our office with people that live our values, and providing the tools our team members need to build their skills to help them continue to grow their careers.

**What's the best piece of advice you give to someone who wants to rise up the ranks to firm leadership?**

This is a difficult question—because I am also learning and growing in this role, and I have a great team that I trust will continue to give me their unvarnished perspectives and feedback so I can be a better leader. One of the best general counsel leaders I have seen in action, Michelle Lucero (GC of Children's Hospital), once gave a group of female leaders this advice and I cling to it: Be authentic, figure out what you do great and do that more, figure out what others do great and show them off and lift them up so they can do that more, too.

Brian Henry, Coca-Cola North America general counsel, spoke on one of my panels and, when talking about leadership, he said, "Why not you? Ask questions, advocate for others and advocate for yourself."

One of the reasons I joined Crowell is because I believe Crowell walks the walk. A few years back, I heard Ellen Dwyer, chair of our firm's executive committee, speak to an LCLD audience. She said, "We need to be transparent with our attorneys; we need to talk about the challenges they'll face in this profession, what and how they achieve success, and then let them know we believe in them by our words

and our actions." That has always resonated with me.

**Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to managing partner?** We would be here all day if I listed all the people that had significant and meaningful influence in helping propel my career. My husband and family support me to step in and step up every single day. All of the women who serve on the Latinas First Foundation that I co-founded with Juanita Chacon 10 years ago to provide scholarships to Latinas to attend college and graduate school (providing nearly 200 scholarships!) give me the space to lead and learn, make mistakes, and trust that I will put in the work to get things done. Those that I work with now have made this transition to Crowell seamless—they give me the energy and confidence to do my best work every day. And, my friends in this community who have served as sponsors, mentors, confidantes and my "kitchen table" since I started law school. These incredible people have showed up for me in ways that I cannot put into words, but if there is one single factor that has contributed to my success, it is that I have people in my corner who believe in me.

**What would you tell your younger self?** *Stay the course, but just do it with a few more breaks to enjoy the scenery.*

**As a law firm leader, what impact would you like to have on your firm and/or the legal industry as a whole?** When I was a junior lawyer, I heard that lawyers with similar backgrounds that looked like me might



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achieve parity in the legal profession in 2080 if the profession continued down the same road. I hope to continue to be involved in efforts to shake that up. I look forward to a day when we value people as they are and for who they are and give them the platform to share those experiences to make the legal profession reflective of the communities we serve.

**What lessons, if any, did you learn in 2020/2021 (the core-COVID-19 years)?** There are many lessons learned from the pandemic, but one that stands out: when the status quo is disrupted, communication and transparency become even more critical. The pandemic has shined a spotlight on how we can pass along efficiencies to our clients, but also how we can adapt to provide high-level support to our attorneys. We are at yet another critical point. We need to strategize how we take the information learned about how the pandemic impacted career progression across underrepresented communities and circle back to those communities to minimize long-term barriers to success.

**What three key elements you would like to focus on for 2022?** Make every relationship count. Listen and learn. Be grateful.