

## How I Made Office Managing Partner: 'I Demonstrated Leadership. I Prioritized DE&I, and Dedicated Efforts To Ensure That Everyone's Voice Was Heard,' Says Chahira Solh of Crowell & Moring

**"Self-promotion is key to making sure people know about all the amazing things you've accomplished. If you're not comfortable talking about yourself, find a colleague or sponsor that can help you."**

By Tasha Norman

**Chahira Solh, 40, Crowell & Moring, Orange County, Ca.**

**Practice area:** Antitrust & Competition.

**Law school and year of graduation.** Northwestern University School of Law, 2006.

**How long have you been at the firm?** Since 2006.

**What year were you promoted to office managing partner?** I was promoted to managing partner of the Orange County office in March of 2019. I was elected to the firm's management board in March 2021. I had been a partner at the firm since January 2016 before being promoted to managing partner.



Chahira Solh  
courtesy photo

**What's the biggest surprise you experienced in becoming office managing partner?** The biggest surprise I've experienced is realizing the positive impact my decisions and leadership have

had on the office. I pride myself on creating a collaborative work environment that aligns with the goals of the firm overall. The Orange County office has continued to grow, and our bonds have become stronger through enormous challenges in the last year during the pandemic. We have consistently emphasized diversity, equity and inclusion, which have led to great outcomes, including welcoming a summer class that is 100% diverse, as well as focusing on attracting laterals who are 100% diverse. My role has offered me insights into what is necessary to run a national law firm, and that has been incredibly exciting and rewarding.

**What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you office managing partner?** There were a few factors that led to my elevation as managing partner of the Orange County office. First, my demonstrated leadership skills at the firm, including my governance and leadership on various national committees. Second, my dedicated efforts toward building consensus, to ensure that everyone's voice is heard and considered.



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As a result, I've created a workplace environment that is collegial, collaborative and transparent. Furthermore, I have always prioritized a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, and I'm grateful to work at a firm where leadership recognized and rewarded my efforts and contributions. Finally, I've worked hard at client development and marketing, and thus have been fortunate enough to build a successful antitrust litigation practice.

**What's the key to successful business development in your opinion?** There are many important factors to successful business development, but they all start with investing in relationships and building trust with clients/prospective clients. While building relationships can be time consuming, it is an extremely

worthwhile investment, especially when you are a diverse female professional in the legal industry. When coaching younger attorneys, I often underscore the importance of being responsive and proactive, delivering quality client service, and being a problem-solver for their clients. Successful business development isn't just about expanding and cultivating client relationships for yourself, it's equally important to introduce clients to other members of your team, including the junior lawyers and those that are subject matter experts in a particular (specialty) area. Investing in building relationships allow you to form partnerships, both internally and externally, and become a trusted adviser.

**Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to managing partner?** Dan Sasse, a partner at the firm and also a member of the management board and executive committee, has been a true sponsor since my first day at Crowell. He created client opportunities for me, ensured that the right people at the firm and on the clients' side knew of my contributions and successes and provided me with consistent constructive feedback to help me grow and flourish. Additionally, he enlisted me to help lead and build a diverse antitrust practice, including antitrust defense litigation, counseling and antitrust recovery. The diversity of my practice allows me a unique perspective, which has helped me deliver greater client service and the growth of my practice. I'm extremely fortunate and grateful for Dan's continued support and championing.

**What's the best piece of advice you could give a partner who wants to elevate to firm leadership?** Make sure you're investing in building relationships across the firm—with partners, associates and other leaders. Take the initiative to learn

how to be a good leader, including partnering with advisers and mentors and investing in formal leadership training.

**Knowing what you know now what advice would you give to yourself and/or what would you do differently?**

*First, it is so important to have advisers who can help mentor and sponsor you. This group should be from all different parts of your life—not just your practice group or firm.*

*Second, self-promotion is key to making sure people know about all the amazing things you've accomplished. If you're not comfortable talking about yourself, find a colleague or sponsor that can help you.*

*Third, make time for yourself. It's so easy to get caught up in trying to achieve the next goal that you forget that you need to also take time for yourself to reflect on what you need to help you perform at your best.*

*These are all things I focus on regularly and try to demonstrate and implement for others in my role as a leader.*

**What initiatives at the firm are you most proud of?** I'm really proud of the initiatives that have focused on expanding diversity, equity and inclusion, and I've been involved with several at the firm. The two that I'm most proud of are the implementation of the Crowell Rule and our Social Justice Conversations. Last summer, the firm created a Racial Equity Task Force, focused on increasing and improving racial equity at the firm. I led the workstream focused on attorney growth, and we developed the Crowell Rule, which helps to ensure that we consider the top diverse talent that was being presented to us by recruiters. The rule requires that, for every attorney position, at least 30% of the candidates interviewed are those who identify as racially or ethnically diverse, and at least 50% of the candidates interviewed

are those that identify as diverse by gender, LGBTQ+, race or ethnicity. This has allowed us to place a greater focus and emphasis on diverse candidates that might have slipped through the cracks before.

Furthermore, in the Orange County office we started Social Justice Conversations in the summer of 2020. The office convenes weekly to discuss timely topics surrounding social justice movements, which has not only been a great way for us to learn more on the issue, but also allows us to participate and contribute to the movement. For example, staff and attorneys in the office take turns leading a series of discussions, such as the Black experience in America, the Asian-American experience, and we have plans to expand the discussions to focus on other marginalized groups. I have been so moved leading the office through these really powerful discussions, and it really demonstrated that we have a workplace culture of inclusiveness and transparency where everyone openly shared their experiences and opinions.

**What do you think is the biggest challenge facing women leaders today in the legal industry?** One of the biggest challenges is still having to constantly battle against gender stereotypes that are inherent in different leadership styles. For example, women often have to change their leadership style to conform to what is perceived as the "norm," or they come off as "too bossy." Training is key, including areas involving leadership skills, gender communication, implicit bias, among others. Be proactive, engage, and try to find solutions to help navigate around these challenges.

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