



ATTORNEY OF THE YEAR WINNER: SUSAN KOHLMANN

JENNER & BLOCK

Finalists for the Law Journal’s Attorney of the Year award are often considered for their outstanding case work or leading their firms through challenging times.

Susan Kohlmann, a partner at Jenner & Block, did both over this past year—all while bolstering her public-service bonafides and taking the reins as president of the New York City Bar Association in May.

“She’s incredibly talented in her day job as a litigator and an IP and media lawyer. But she also understands that being a lawyer is more than just the day job,” said City Bar executive director Bret Parker. “She’s involved in the New York legal community in so many ways and she understands the importance of us giving back.”

He added: “And I don’t think she sleeps.”

For her part, Kohlmann provided a relatively modest answer when asked by the Law Journal how she juggles her caseload for Jenner & Block’s intellectual property practice, leading the 25,000-member City Bar all while holding her seat as board chair for New York Lawyers for the Public Interest: She credited her grown



Susan Kohlmann.

Photo: Ryland West/ALM

children for helping to keep her grounded and the “incredibly talented group of lawyers” in her orbit at her firm.

And daily exercise helps too, she said.

“Being a good leader is in many ways excelling at being a good team player: supporting, trusting and cultivating the incredible talent around me, being open, recognizing what I don’t know and what may not be working, embracing change and shared goals with enthusiasm, listening well and taking action,” Kohlmann said.

Kohlmann took questions for this profile while she was down in Atlanta arguing before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit on behalf of Paramount Global in a trademark suit over the use of title of MTV’s “Floribama Shore,” the Southern spinoff of “Jersey Shore.”



Susan Kohlmann.

Photo: Ryland West/ALM

Kohlmann’s assessment that being a good leader stems from being a good team leader tracks with what others said about her leadership style (and her 2019 statements to the Law Journal when she was recognized as one of the year’s Distinguished Leaders).

“She’s super smart, really, really good at what she does. But she’s also just filled with grace, kindness, thoughtfulness—all of those leadership qualities that I feel like are hard to find as the full package,” said Katya Jestin, a co-managing partner for Jenner & Block who has known Kohlmann for 15 years and served with her on the firm’s policy committee. “You could have the most brilliant lawyer who may not be the nicest person or you could have a great person who’s not the greatest lawyer. She’s truly the full package and she’s beloved and revered.”

Kohlmann was also a managing partner at Jenner & Block’s New York office from 2016 up until April, when she stepped aside to have more time for her term as president of the City

Bar. During her tenure, the firm’s Big Apple headcount grew to 80 attorneys. Earlier this year, she oversaw the firm’s move to a new office.

Clients have also lauded Kohlmann’s aptitude as a leader—she worked on a team that successfully represented Diageo North America in a trademark dispute over the company’s Bulleit whiskey brand.

“Her legal acumen is astute as she gently dismantles witnesses with her scalpel-like questions,” Jordan Razza, associate counsel to Diageo, said of Kohlmann. “Susan’s calm demeanor grounds her team (and her clients) and her interest in training younger lawyers comes through in the opportunities and mentoring she provides. Susan creates a collaborative, positive environment for everyone, except, possibly, opposing counsel.”

For young attorneys who may seek to follow in her footsteps, Kohlmann offered up some words of advice.

“I am so optimistic about the profession because in this moment when we need lawyers more than ever, I have seen lawyers step up in every way to address the critical issues we face,” she said. “To someone starting out, I would say get broad experience in the beginning, find out what you care about and get involved, really involved, in whatever the cause or issue. Don’t sell yourself short, seize the opportunities as they come, enjoy life and have fun.”