

Debevoise Lawyers Tout Benefits of Bar Leadership

BY JENNA GREENE

DEBORAH Enix-Ross remembers the first time she attended a New York City Bar Association meeting many years ago.

“I looked around, and not only was I the only woman in the room, I was the youngest person by 25 years,” she said. “I thought ‘Why am I here? Why am I doing this? I’m tired, I’m overworked.’”

And then she remembered: “I wanted to be around the brightest leaders in the profession. I wanted to better myself.”

Now the chair of the American Bar Association’s House of Delegates, Enix-Ross is one of four prominent litigators at Debevoise & Plimpton, a 650-lawyer firm, who currently occupy leadership roles in bar associations or professional groups.

John Kiernan, who is co-chair of Debevoise’s litigation practice, is the president of the New York City Bar Association. Leading a bar association is a way to round out a resume and indirectly reassure clients that they’re in good hands.

“Lots of clients with complicated problems look for a broad-gauged lawyer to advise them,” he said.

It’s also a way to forge relationships that can directly benefit clients.

“It doesn’t change the zealotry of your advocacy, but the tone is different if you know the person on the other side—and the tone is also sometimes different if you’re perceived as a leader of the profession,” Kiernan said.

Besides the importance of public service and giving back to the profession, the Debevoise attorneys had other reasons for making such a substantial—and unbilled—time commitment.

“It allows you to think about broader issues,” said David W. Rivkin, who is co-chair

of Debevoise’s international arbitration group and president of the International Bar Association. “It’s an opportunity to have a real impact.”

In Rivkin’s case, that meant helping draft the International Bar Association’s rules on taking evidence in international arbitrations, as well as working on the association’s Practical Guide on Business and Human Rights for Business Lawyers.

The experience wasn’t just academic. Debevoise today announced the launch of a new practice, the business integrity group.

Co-led by Rivkin, the group offers global clients “structured, risk-sensitive guidance on leading integrity standards,” such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, according to the firm.

In other words, areas that overlap with Rivkin’s bar-related projects and where he’s already recognized as an authority.

The subject matter also dovetails nicely with partner Donald Donovan’s work as president of the International Council for Commercial Arbitration, a worldwide nongovernmental organization, as well as his prior stint as president of the American Society of International Law, which ended in 2014.

“It’s an opportunity to meet people who are engaged in a thing you care about,” said Donovan, who is also a leader of the new business integrity practice and co-chair of Debevoise’s international arbitration group.

Being a leader in a professional organization “allows you to develop trust and credibility. It’s a very important tool to bring to your work,” he said.

And developing relationships with other attorneys means that “We can have a calm and considered off-the-record conversation with [opposing counsel] when it benefits the client.”



From left, **John Kiernan**, **David W. Rivkin**, **Donald Donovan** and **Deborah Enix-Ross** of Debevoise & Plimpton

But it’s not all about business and networking. “Some of my best personal friends are people I’ve gotten to know through bar organizations,” he said.

Or as Donovan put it, “It makes your professional life more fun.”

There’s another reason why Debevoise may have so many lawyers so deeply involved in bar groups: the firm’s seniority-based lockstep compensation model for partners. Which means a partner won’t be punished financially for devoting a significant amount of (unbilled) time to head a bar group for a year.

“It’s part of the ethos of the firm, as pro bono is too,” Donovan said. “It’s a firm-wide commitment.”

@ Jenna Greene is a reporter for Law Journal affiliate Litigation Daily. She can be reached at jgreene@alm.com. Twitter @jgreenejenna