

Invested in Success



Sheila R. Adams is an Antitrust & Competition partner based in New York. She is Co-Chair of the Diversity/Advanced Committee of the ABA Antitrust Law Section and a member of the Board of Directors of the Columbia Law School Association. In 2019, she received National Bar Association '40 Under 40 Nation's Best Advocates' awards, including for 'Excellence in Leadership.'

What are the key trends in your practice area for 2022 and what do GCs and boards need to think about?

SA: The antitrust space has seen significant activity over the past several years and we can expect continued aggressive enforcement in both merger review and conduct investigations, as well as potential legislative changes at both federal and state levels. In-house counsel should be closely aligned with antitrust counsel because there is so much uncertainty about how the landscape is changing,

including how enforcement agencies will view certain contemplated mergers or acquisitions.

UA: As someone whose practice involves government investigations, I also think the new administration will be more aggressive on the enforcement front, especially in heavily regulated areas. Organizations need to be prepared for that. We're helping companies by conducting compliance reviews, ensuring they have robust internal policies and controls.

How has Covid-19 affected the way you work?

UA: We've realized that many things that used to be done face-to-face can be done remotely. But you have to work creatively to keep your team engaged in a remote environment and it's harder to get in front of new clients where there's no existing relationship.

SA: The advent of virtual proceedings, particularly depositions, has shown that these things can be accomplished remotely. But there's fatigue in the medium, and a hunger to reconnect in person. There's value in being face-to-face with both colleagues and clients.

Tell us about your pathway to partnership.

UA: From a young age, I wanted to be an advocate. I love distilling the facts into a compelling story.

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—Sheila R. Adams, Partner, Davis Polk

I went to law school, then to a corporate law firm. I've always believed in public service, so as a fifth-year associate I left to become a federal prosecutor in the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia, where I learned a lot. I joined Davis Polk as a partner a year ago.

SA: I come from a humble background; I'm a first-generation college graduate and the first in my family to pursue an advanced degree. I did some entry-level legal jobs prior to law school and learned that I love litigation, including the ability to piece together a story and to advocate.

I attended Columbia Law and summered at Davis Polk, during which I split my time between the firm and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. I then clerked for Judge Raymond A. Jackson (E.D. Va.) and then-Chief Judge Carl E. Stewart (Fifth Circuit). I came back to the firm as a third-year associate, was promoted to counsel in my ninth year, and became a partner this past July, after one year as counsel.

What characterizes diversity at Davis Polk?

SA: Everyone from firm management down fundamentally believes in the importance of DEI. We also have a healthy sense of introspection about how we can be better. We've done things such as sponsorship of professional development programs geared toward diverse pipelines and required training on how to identify and counteract biases. The senior partners also have been immensely supportive of me as a new partner. That's a strength of the firm's culture - they don't just make you a partner and then leave you to it. Davis Polk is invested in my success, and I am invested in the firm's.

UA: Davis Polk understands it's a not just a moral priority, but a business imperative to hire and develop diverse talent. Diversity of people leads to diversity of perspectives, which enriches our culture and delivers better results for our clients. I'm also



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particularly proud of our affinity groups. I'm on the Steering Committee of our Black Affinity Group.

What is your advice for junior attorneys?

UA: Assess where you are every few years, and don't be afraid to go in a new direction. Take a proactive role in your own professional development. Be respectfully vocal about the types of experiences you're looking for and types of matters you'd like to work on.

SA: Believe in yourself. Let other people say no to you but don't say no to yourself. Don't rule yourself out. Whether it's work you want to do or professional development opportunities - ask for it. Remember 'no' might just mean 'not yet.' ■