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Jami Wintz McKeon:

To reach the top of America's largest law firm, all Jami Wintz McKeon had to do was become a multi-talking, frequent-flying superwoman who once set a record for BlackBerry data usage. That's progress. (Isn't it?)

THE Chairman

by JOHN MARCHESE

Jami McKeon passes her BlackBerry Bold across the polished hardwood conference table to show what she typed just a moment ago. She typed it without once looking at the device, while holding my gaze and saying, "I'm so fast typing on a BlackBerry that my husband calls it a party trick."

"I can do it without looking. I can sit on a train and type even if there's no room, or if I'm on a plane and they've made you put the laptop away. My last BlackBerry, I actually wore the letters off so you couldn't see what they were. Before wi-fi on planes or broadband on your laptop, I could spend the whole plane ride typing things. I could work no matter what hour, day or night. It really made a difference in my life."

In the complicated calculus of achievement, it would be difficult to quantify what real difference the BlackBerry made in the career of Jami Wintz McKeon, who this morning has taken over a conference room on the 18th floor of the Market Street headquarters of the 140-year-old law firm Morgan, Lewis & Bockius. She is now the firm's chairman. (She doesn't mind the male suffix. "Chairwoman," she says, "sounds too much like *charwoman*." A lot of people try

to neutralize things by calling her the "chair," but referring to her as an inanimate object really doesn't solve any gender-sensitivity issues.)

In McKeon's three-decade-plus career at Morgan Lewis — "I'm a lifer," she says — the firm has gone from one of the stuffiest of the old-line Philadelphia shops to a go-go national and international powerhouse, a top player in what the industry calls BigLaw and now, with a recent expansion to nearly 2,000 lawyers, the largest firm in the country.

McKeon has been at the center of Morgan Lewis's most significant recent growth. Soon after the turn of this century, she acted as the firm's "facilitator," helping to assimilate 159 lawyers from the failing California firm Brobeck Phleger & Harrison into the Morgan fold and building a business beachhead on the West Coast.

"The amount of time she spent on airplanes," says Fran Milone, who stepped down as Morgan's chairman late last year and remains a partner. "I was always in the 100,000- or 150,000-mile range. That was nothing to her. I actually think she enjoys it the more she has to do and the busier she is, and the more juggling.

Why, I don't know."

At first, McKeon commuted between her home in Philly and San Francisco. Then she moved her family out West; soon after that, the financial crisis hit, and she had to reverse the commute to handle her many financial-service-industry clients on the East Coast. At one point, she says, she was informed by BlackBerry that her personal network usage was the highest of any individual in the country, exceeding that of entire companies.

She moved back to Philadelphia in 2012, just around the time her partners were thinking about a replacement for Milone, who'd led Morgan Lewis for 15 years. Late last year, right after she rose to the chairmanship by unanimous decision, the Villanova Law graduate worked out a "lateral acquisition" of the failing Boston-based firm Bingham, McCutchen, bringing in 226 new partners and more than 500 other lawyers and staff.

Though law is big business in Philadelphia, with 31,000 jobs and an estimated \$5 billion in economic impact, Morgan Lewis is now a Philadelphia institution that has transcended the city's boundaries. "No one thinks of the

big New York law firms as *New York* law firms,” says Ajay Raju, CEO and executive chairman of the much smaller and more localized firm Dilworth Paxson; he worked for Morgan Lewis for four years. “Just like there’s local pride that Comcast is a Philly company that is now a big national and international company, it’s the same with Morgan Lewis.” With all the new lawyers from Bingham, it’s nearly a foregone conclusion that the firm’s revenues this year will reach \$2 billion.

Did I mention that Jami McKeon is a woman?

In an ideal world, that fact wouldn’t be remarkable. In the real world, it is. “We don’t yet live in a post-racial or post-gender society,” Raju observes. “But there are some people, like Jami, who manage to transcend that.”

Jami McKeon’s rise to the top of one of BigLaw’s biggest is in many ways a typical story of success — a mix of ambition, grinding hard work, savvy and some good luck. But because of the stubborn slowness of the march toward gender equality, particularly in precincts where there are big rewards in power and money — law, medicine, politics and corporate boardrooms — she becomes a *de facto* symbol. Is Chairman McKeon a bellwether of women finally blasting a sizeable hole in the glass ceiling? Or is she an outlier whose not-quite-but-nearly-unique status simply focuses attention on intractable inequity?

McKeon is 58 years old, and started in the law business when opposing lawyers (and a few partners) thought nothing of calling her “Sweetie.” She has always gotten her thoughts down best using a keyboard, and as a young associate, long before the invention of the BlackBerry, she commandeered an IBM Selectric II typewriter for her office. “People warned me that everybody would think I was a secretary,” she remembers.

Now, a few months into her first five-year term atop Morgan Lewis, McKeon says, “Quite frankly, when I was elected chair of the firm, I hadn’t expected that there would be quite as much focus on or interest in the fact that I’m a woman.”

McKeon stands five-foot-two. Because of that, she almost always wears heels. On the day she performed her BlackBerry party trick, they were leopard-trimmed Manolo Blahniks. She also wore a knee-length Escada dress with a geometric print, and a prominent gold necklace. “I think most people think I dress professionally,” she says, “but I just wear what I like. Periodically, women in the firm say they like it that I dress in ways that aren’t typical and conservative.” Her hair is auburn, and she parts it in the middle and wears it several inches onto her shoulders. Swimming is one of her favorite pursuits — the only job she ever held besides

lawyer was lifeguard — and there is still a distinct athleticism about her.

McKeon was a cheerleader in high school, and according to both colleagues and friends, she has remained something of a cheerleader, and that approach has served her well. You could say she comes from a showbiz family. Her grandfather, Julie Wintz, was a well-known big-band leader in his day. Her father decided on a corporate career but married a Broadway dancer who gave up her career when she got pregnant with Jami, the eldest of four siblings. Throughout school, Jami Wintz performed in summer stock. “Inside every lawyer,” she says, “there’s a frustrated actor.” Her favorite acting role was Adelaide, the much-jilted gangster’s moll in *Guys and Dolls*.

“People always told me I’d make a good lawyer,” McKeon says. After graduating from Morristown High in 1974, she went to Penn State and studied political science and Russian. At the beginning of her senior year in Happy Valley, financial troubles at the university led to cutbacks on library hours. Jami Wintz wrote a letter to the *Daily Collegian* that was a preview of her ability to combine work life and social life and manage all-night BlackBerry sessions on the red-eye flight from San Francisco. In it, she described herself as “one of those who has always supported the idea of a 24-hour library. ... I am one of the students who happens to like being involved in campus activities, and is often unable to use the library until 9 or 10 p.m. That option is no longer available to me.”

Still, she managed to squeeze in enough study time to get admitted to Villanova Law. “It wasn’t a sophisticated choice,” she says. “I didn’t know anything about law schools. I knew I didn’t want to go to law school in a city, although I don’t remember why. And my aunt lived near Villanova.”

Kathleen Wilkinson, now an equity partner with Wilson Elser Moskowitz Edelman & Dicker and a former chancellor of the Philadelphia Bar, remembers meeting Jami Wintz at the photo sessions on the first day of law school and sitting in the same row in their first classes. “She was one of the students who always seemed to know the answer,” Wilkinson recalls. “She always had her hand up. She was not afraid. I was proud of her. And this was the first days, when nobody wanted to put her hand up.”

Jami Wintz married Michael McKeon not long after graduation, just before joining Morgan Lewis as an associate. One of the Morgan Lewis partners who interviewed her for the job was Fran Milone. “I’d be lying if I said I remember interviewing her,” Milone tells me. “But my first impressions thereafter were of someone

After she remarried, McKeon decided to have more children — and asked her two teenagers for advice. “What did I do wrong?” her daughter Samantha remembers here saying. “Do you feel like I would have been a better mother if I hadn’t worked as much?”

who was very outgoing — an associate who stood out. Most people do not stand out. Jami was able to both be very successful in substantive aspects and quickly get involved in cultural leadership. That’s rare. She just built on that over the years.”

Over the years, McKeon also managed to build a family of four children. Two were born in the early ’80s, before she was made partner, and two more came along after she married her second husband, John Holloway, a onetime Morgan Lewis associate who moved out of law to join a health-care business. He now directs the Quattrone Center for the Fair Administration of Justice and teaches a class at Penn’s law school.

The chances of a woman becoming an equity partner in a large firm aren’t good. Just one in five equity partners at the average law firm is female. For female lawyers with children, it’s even harder. A woman who becomes head of a BigLaw top 100 firm beats very long odds — as of last fall, there were just nine. McKeon can not only name most of her new women peers; she can join them at a restaurant table for dinner — something that has happened a few times.

“It’s remarkable what she’s accomplished,” says Lynn Yeakel, a longtime women’s equality advocate, former political candidate, and director of the Institute for Women’s Health and Leadership at Drexel’s College of Medicine. “And one of the things that is so interesting is that she has four children. The women lawyers who started out breaking the glass ceiling back in the ’80s — most of them got off the partner track when they started having families.”

McKeon’s friend and Villanova Law classmate, noted litigator Bobbie Pichini, makes a sharper point: “The [legal] profession has suffered because so many young women have found it necessary to leave the profession to achieve what they wanted to achieve in life.”

AS HER STAR HAS RISEN, McKeon has been asked to speak to groups about her success. Last year, at the Women’s Resource Center Leadership Luncheon, she started something of a stir with this piece of advice: “A good marriage is nice; great childcare is indispensable.”

“Honest to God,” she says now. “I get so many reactions from people on that quote. The point I’m making is, if you’re going to be a parent and succeed, you have to have two things.

One is intestinal fortitude, because you know that people are going to question whether you should be home with your kids when you're at work, or whether you should be at work when you're home with your kids."

In 1986, as McKeon was in her fifth year as an associate at Morgan Lewis, Grant Broadcasting, an independent television company with stations in three cities, filed for bankruptcy protection in Philadelphia, where one of its stations, WGBS, was located. Grant hired Morgan Lewis to represent its interests in working through restructuring, and McKeon was assigned to the legal team.

"I embarked on a two- or three-year period," she remembers, "representing this company in proceedings that involved television studios in California, producers, television companies, big law firms — very huge issues. I think it was the largest bankruptcy at the time, certainly in Pennsylvania. It was a great experience, because I was in court all the time against a wide array of firms. It certainly made a difference in my legal career."

"Jami was a complete workaholic," remembers one of her adversaries in the case, Larry McMichael, then a young partner with Dilworth Paxson. "I remember seeing her in the courtroom and asking her when was the last time she slept. *'Three days ago.'* She wouldn't eat; I felt compelled to feed her all the time."

Nearly 30 years later, McKeon recalls "working ridiculously hard, working 3,000 hours a year for three years in a row." She credits the experience with why she was chosen as a partner. "There weren't a lot of women around then," she says. "But if you did good work, that wasn't questioned. I didn't have anyone questioning whether I was committed to my job."

But the obvious question now is, *How did you work 3,000 hours for three years and manage two young children?* She has a standard, and somewhat glib, reply: "Some times better than others."

In her case, a young woman who worked at the day care where she took her children needed an apartment and became the McKeons' live-in nanny. Michael McKeon, who is described by his ex-wife as "a fantastic guy," was a successful management consultant. He traveled constantly. "He was very absent," McKeon says. "My father always traveled, and my mom was a stay-at-home mom. It never occurred to me that both spouses would be involved. I got great help, but the older children were my job."

McKeon adds, "I always tell people, 'You have to go and get great childcare. Don't decide that you're only going to have it until six o'clock, or that that's where you're going to save money.' Have a backup plan. Have backup three layers deep. You have to do your job with your mind free and focused on what you're doing."

If these issues seem dated in the *Lean In* age, they're not. Not long ago, the *Atlantic*, the venerable journal of literature and politics that in

recent years has become the smart set's magazine of gender studies, ran an article by Anne-Marie Slaughter, a foreign policy expert who had been dean of Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Slaughter told of leaving her job as the State Department's first woman director of policy planning because the dual demands of her job and family meant "I could no longer be both the parent and professional I wanted to be." The article, "Why Women Still Can't Have It All," became a sensation.

The story was much more nuanced than the headline might indicate, and discussed structural problems in American society that lead to work/life imbalance. Slaughter also admitted that the notion of "having it all" is reserved for a certain already-comfortable elite.

As someone who seems to have actually pulled it off, McKeon knows this. At one point she says to me, "I mean what I'm about to say sincerely, though I'm afraid it's the kind of thing that won't sound that way." Then she continues:

"There are people who do really hard things for a living, people who work two factory jobs. I had a babysitter once who would work a day job and then after babysitting would go work a night job at UPS, packing up boxes. I worked hard, and it was hard, but it was also an emotionally, intellectually and economically rewarding job. I felt like I was doing something useful and important, and I cared about it. There are a lot of jobs that are a lot harder that people do for a lot less money."

After she remarried, McKeon decided to have more children. Though she still had a punishing schedule, she was now comfortably a partner, and her new husband was very interested in being involved in the child-rearing. Still, McKeon went to her two children — then teenagers — and said, "Okay, I'm about to do it again. So here's a chance to tell me what I did wrong the first time. Take your best shot."

"I do remember her asking us, 'What did I do wrong?'" says Samantha, McKeon's 29-year-old daughter, who is public relations manager for a fashion designer in New York. "Do you feel like I would have been a better mother if I hadn't worked as much? Did I miss a lot? Do you feel like I'm not attentive enough?"

"I kind of laughed," Samantha remembers. "To be honest, we have a better relationship than most of my friends have with their mothers. A lot of people can't imagine not having their mom around so much. She did work all the time. But looking back, I never felt that she wasn't there. We joke all the time that the only way she does what she does is to have a clone of herself."

CHAIRMAN JAMI MCKEON has commanded another of her law firm's conference rooms, this one on the 19th floor of Morgan Lewis's offices at 101 Park Avenue in New York City, a few blocks south of Grand Central Sta-

tion. As nice as the view in Philadelphia was, the one from the reception area here is stunning, with the hulking presence of the Empire State Building to the southwest and then the southern sweep of downtown Manhattan, with its new, spiky One World Trade Center and, beyond that, the shimmering bay and Ellis Island.

McKeon is here a lot, both on intra-firm business and because she has so many clients in the financial sector. "This is where Wall Street is," she says, though she won't actually name any of her clients. Today, she has adapted her look to the city and is dressed all in black: skirt and long-sleeved turtleneck, knee-high leather boots. There's a splash of silver jewelry. In high school, her nickname was "Jingles" because she liked to wear lots of bracelets.

Bad weather has forced scheduling changes on this trip. She'd cancelled our planned meeting the day before, and then late in the day emailed me: "Can we make it 12:30-2 tomorrow? I will feed you."

The slot had been blocked out for a lunch meeting of lawyers. It got cancelled, but the food was already ordered. McKeon pulls giant Carnegie Deli-sized sandwiches out of a large bag, hands me turkey, and takes a corned beef for herself. We sit and eat (with forks) and chat. The night before, she went to Chelsea for the New York Fashion Week runway show of clothing designer Veronica Beard, for whom Samantha works. "It was very nice," she says, "watching my daughter run around." When she couldn't sleep later that night in her hotel room, McKeon read the reviews of the show on the *Women's Wear Daily* website, then decided, "I'm not sleeping. I might as well be working."

It isn't required these days, but McKeon thinks she could still pull an all-nighter if necessary. She rarely sleeps more than four hours a night, and never has. It's a career secret she didn't share at the Women's Resource Center luncheon, but she acknowledges now, "If I'd been one of those people who need 10 hours of sleep, I couldn't do the job I do and live the life I live. I just wouldn't have enough time."

McKeon's husband, John Hollway, told me a story about being on the beach one day in Florida. "I went and took a dip in the ocean," he remembered, "and when I came back, Jami was sitting reading a book and had headphones on. When I asked her what she was listening to, she gave me the name of a book."

"You're reading a book and listening to a *different* book on tape?" he said. "You're an alien."

"Jami is able to think seriously about more than one thing at once," said Hollway, who is 13 years younger than his wife. (McKeon says the age difference bothered her more than him, mostly because "People think of men as trying to collect trophy wives, and I think that's disparaging when applied to men, and it certainly didn't apply in my case.") "From a domestic point of view," Hollway added, "it was at that

point that I realized I would never win an argument. Her second brain would already be coming up with some counter-argument to whatever my one brain was making.”

I repeat that story now in the Manhattan conference room, and McKeon seems to think that listening to one book while reading another is the most ordinary thing imaginable. “I like my mind to be fully occupied,” she says. “Sometimes if I’m just reading or just listening to something, it isn’t fully occupied.” One of her law partners said he was certain that McKeon had already learned the names of all the 200-odd new partners from Bingham — and the names of their spouses and children.

That partner, Brock Gowdy, a litigator based in San Francisco who came into Morgan Lewis from the distressed Brobeck firm, said the only downside to McKeon running the firm is that she won’t have time to use her legal smarts (from however many brains) in the courtroom.

“I was saying this to her the other day,” Gowdy told me. “One of the sad things about her running this monster that we now have as a firm is, she doesn’t get to do what she really loves doing, which is being a really skilled litigator. She’s a great trial lawyer, one of the best I’ve ever seen. Given the way that publicity works and gender politics works, she’d be the superstar of the American trial bar.”

Instead, she’s running the monster of a law firm. Over the past several decades, law has been transformed into big business, and many

observers believe the impetus toward growth will continue. “The way I looked at it,” says Fran Milone, who oversaw much of Morgan Lewis’s expansion, “if you want to represent, say, the largest tech company in the world, you’ve got to match their needs. Their needs are globalizing. If you can’t match that, if you don’t have the right presence in Asia or in Europe, eventually you’ll be marginalized. When you hit a certain size — and we hit it — you’re in the game. It’s a different game.”

For better or worse, Morgan Lewis’s sheer size and the fact that McKeon is a woman make her a star in arenas beyond the courtroom. Whether she’ll use her status to change things for women in the legal profession is unclear. Over several discussions about her own rise, McKeon repeatedly expressed her belief that Morgan Lewis had been a meritocracy, and she was just someone who did her job. Successful women, she seems to believe, are successful on an individual basis.

“Will I shake things up in terms of doing something radically different — change the culture at Morgan Lewis?” she said at one point. “Definitely not.”

On another day, McKeon told me, “For me, the role-model part is to say, ‘Look at me. I don’t fit the cookie-cutter image. I dress the way I want. I have had children at different stages of my career. I do things in the community that are important to me. There’s no set way. You can bring who you are to the table.’”

Now, as two o’clock approaches, McKeon starts packing her electronics (“I forgot my BlackBerry,” she says, “and it’s driving me crazy”) into a chic Cabrelli rolling bag, stuffs the sack of extra sandwiches on top, and bustles off to catch a car to Penn Station. She needs to be back home for her daughters’ school events. Her husband was supposed to cover that, but his father took a fall in Florida, and Hollway rushed there to be with him.

In the car, McKeon revs up her brains, checking messages from her husband, sending advice to a friend who needs legal help in a criminal matter, talking to me. I ask her what else she had planned to do on this trip.

“A meeting with,” she begins, and pauses. “HmMMM, I wouldn’t want you to say this: a meeting with another law firm that wanted to meet with us.”

A few weeks after our lunch, McKeon flew to Singapore and completed a deal to absorb an 80-lawyer firm in that important Asian business gateway into Morgan Lewis, giving her even more names to memorize. “We didn’t set out to become the biggest firm in the U.S., or one of the five largest in the world, or whatever,” she told me the day after announcing that deal. “Too big would be when we got to the point where we didn’t feel we could operate effectively. We’re nowhere close to that tipping point.”

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