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## Q&A: Morgan Lewis's Stefanie Moll on Houston's Office Expansion and Women Lawyers in the #MeToo Era

In a Q&A, Stefanie Moll, managing partner of Morgan, Lewis & Bockius's Houston office, says she has run into situations in which she was not taken seriously because of her gender, but she found that "out-lawyering" those men was an effective way to solve the problem.

**BY BRENDA SAPINO JEFFREYS**

*MORGAN, LEWIS & BOCKIUS has been in the Texas market since 2004 and in Houston since 2007, but the Houston office has been on an expansion spree. The 67-lawyer office has brought on nine lateral partners over the last year and has added a health care practice. The most recent hire is Sameer Mohan, an M&A and corporate partner who joined the office this month. In this Q&A, Stefanie Moll, managing partner of the office, talks about the Houston legal market and her strategy for positioning the office. Moll also weighs in on the challenges of being a woman lawyer. Her advice for handling men who don't take her seriously because she's a woman? Out-lawyer them.*

*(This Q&A has been edited for length and clarity.)*

**Your firm has added nine lateral partners in the Houston**

**office over the last year. Texas is a very hot lateral market. How did you fend off the competition to persuade the laterals to join your firm?**

Moll: We offer a very clear proposition—a global platform that isn't just a collection of offices. Our offices are highly integrated and have a collaborative culture focused on excellent client service, innovation, and partnership. This proposition is very attractive to partners because it creates opportunity for all of us.

**What is your strategy for lateral hiring? Is the strategy for the Houston office different from the firm-wide approach?**

Moll: Our firmwide growth strategy is always about meeting and anticipating client demand, and that's definitely



Stefanie Moll, Morgan Lewis & Bockius

true in Houston. Many of our newly added partners serve clients in the health care, energy, and technology sectors. These are dynamic, busy industries both in this region and beyond.

**In the #MeToo era, how do you see your role as a woman**

**leading a law office? What challenges as a woman have you faced over your career and how did you overcome them?**

Moll: As both a female lawyer in a leadership position and as a labor and employment lawyer, I believe strongly in having a diverse set of viewpoints and experiences on our team. It improves the advice we can offer our clients and our ability to problem solve in unique ways. With eight female partners in Morgan Lewis's Houston office alone, and Jami McKeon, one of the strongest and highest energy woman leaders out there as the chair of our firm, any challenges a female lawyer at our firm could face would be external and thankfully not internal. We help our women lawyers develop with internal initiatives that focus on business development. Our remote working program and our "ramp up" program for lawyers who have been out on extended leave are offered to all lawyers, regardless of gender, but do strive to make working easier on caregivers, who are frequently women.

In terms of my own career, I joined Morgan Lewis seven years ago this spring, and I've stayed because of the opportunities I've had and the wonderful

lawyers I am privileged to work with. Times are changing, and for the better, for women in the law. We are doing better in our positions and there are more of us. While there are still too few in leadership roles, our firm is a great example of what it looks like to have women in the top positions. There was a time when women were treated as "support" or window dressing—when their contribution to a pitch was being there as a token. Now clients are demanding teams in which diverse lawyers are playing major roles. More of our clients are women, but both men and women are insisting on seeing real change. Like many other women, I have had my share of men who talked down to me or made clear that they weren't taking me seriously. In my experience, out-lawyering them was always an effective way to solve that problem, but even those men are becoming aware that they can't act that way anymore and succeed.

**How would you describe the Houston legal market and how does Morgan Lewis fit into it?**

Moll: The Houston legal market is dynamic, so the changes to the Houston office are particularly important in helping us meet the ever-changing needs

of our clients and having a significant presence in the business areas that are most important to the city. Given the region's significant and leading hospital and health systems, we are very happy to have welcomed a large, prestigious health care team late last year that is already well-integrated into our leading national health care team. We also have a globally recognized Latin America practice that was bolstered by two top partners who joined us last year. With M&A partner Sameer Mohan's arrival last week, we are building our corporate practice as well. And we have powerful and effective teams of trial lawyers. But just like the firm itself, we have a wide range of capabilities. I think we stand out for our breadth of service and our global platform.

**How will the Houston office look in a year?**

Moll: We will continue to build on the vibrant teams we have attracted. Our goal is to have truly elite lawyers in the practices we have in our firm, including in Houston, so we focus on that rather than size.

*Senior reporter Brenda Sapino Jeffreys covers the business of law in Texas. Contact her at [bjeffreys@alm.com](mailto:bjeffreys@alm.com). On Twitter: @BrendaSJeffreys*