

## How I Made Managing Partner: 'Dedicate Yourself to More Than Just Client Work,' Says Laurie Carr Mims of Kecker, Van Nest & Peters

By ALM Staff

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**Laurie Carr Mims, 47, Managing Partner at Kecker, Van Nest & Peters, San Francisco, CA**

**Practice area:** Litigation

**Law school and year of graduation:** Harvard Law School, 2002

*The following has been edited for style.*

**How long have you been at the firm?**

I have been at the firm since 2005. I became managing partner in March 2023.

**How would you describe your career trajectory (was it organic or an active pursuit)?**

My career trajectory has been organic. Entering law school, I didn't have a clear roadmap—I don't come from a family of lawyers, and I didn't know all the options available in the legal field. I was initially interested in journalism as an undergraduate, and in law school I considered government roles or joining an in-house legal department. When I joined a law firm, I wasn't thinking one day I'd become partner or managing partner. Instead, I focused on the work—learning about new industries, understanding clients' businesses, and piecing together facts to craft compelling narratives for judges and juries. To my surprise, I found myself really enjoying law firm work, especially the intellectual challenge and dynamic nature of litigation and trials.

**What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in electing/promoting you to your cur-**



Courtesy photo

**Laurie Carr Mims of Kecker, Van Nest & Peters**

**rent role? Was it your performance on a specific case? A personality trait? Making connections with the right people?**

Firm leadership roles weren't something I sought out. They have been a natural extension of my passion for my firm and our special culture. I care deeply about mentoring associates and helping them grow as lawyers, and about fostering a collaborative, supportive environment. This has led me to serve on the firm's management committee and on our compensation committee for several years, and I previously ran our summer associate program and chaired our attorney development and training committee. I also served as vice-chair and then chair of the bar association of San Francisco's litigation section.

I've built good relationships with partners and professional staff over the years, and people trust me and come to me. That's a big reason I was asked to serve as managing partner.

**What unique challenges do you face as it relates to your role?**

When I accepted the managing partner role, it was personally important to me that I continue to spend most of my time litigating cases. Also, our firm wants our lawyers, including those in management roles, to spend most of their time on what they love and do best, serving clients and trying cases. To that end, we hired a Chief Operating Officer to support management and to handle the day-to-day operations of our growing business.

A second challenge is an exciting one—it's meeting the needs of the firm's talented next generation of partners. A decade or so ago, we had three or four people taking lead roles over trials and business generation, and today that number has quadrupled. The next five years are going to matter a lot as we professionalize and adapt how we operate.

**What's the best piece of advice you give to someone who wants to rise up the ranks to lead an office?**

Leadership requires more than just excellent work on cases. It's about taking ownership, building relationships, and contributing to the broader success of your firm. It's earned by showing you care about the people with whom you work and about the future of the firm.

My advice is to stay engaged. Raise your hand and join initiatives, get involved in committees, and avoid siloing yourself in your office. At a firm like ours, everyone—associates included—has a voice and the potential to make an impact. We value proactivity.

Also, take time to understand the business side of the firm. Ask questions, stay curious, and look for ways to help your firm grow and succeed. Dedicate yourself to more than just client

work. Get to know your colleagues on a personal level, learn from and mentor others, attend firm lunches and events, and actively contribute to the operations and culture that make the firm thrive. The connections you build will shape your career trajectory.

**Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to your current role?**

First, the environment at Kecker—the collegiality, the celebration of teamwork, and the shared accomplishments—is one I thrived in. That has a lot to do with the tone at the top and a shared responsibility for giving back to the culture.

I'll call out Jan Little and Elliot Peters by name, because they were the first two partners I worked with at Kecker, and they helped me see that the firm could be my professional home. As I continued working with them over the years, they encouraged me to take leadership roles on cases and within the firm. They trusted me to rise to meet the challenge. I also owe a huge debt of gratitude to our retired partner Stuart Gasner, who brought me into cases in the life sciences space, including plaintiff-side work. Stuart shared client relationships generously and gave me my first opportunity to serve as lead counsel at trial, when he could have kept that role, which he had played (expertly) many times before, for himself. His generosity allowed me to build my own practice and trial track record, especially in life sciences, which is now my primary practice area.

**How do you utilize technology to benefit the firm/practice and/or business development?**

Kecker's specialty is going to trial. Technology must serve and support our people and enhance our ability to be the best trial teams for our clients. Whether it's helping deliver exceptional presentations at trial or freeing people to focus on solving the toughest questions, technology must serve what truly matters: winning cases and serving clients.

For example, we use technology tools that make it easy to access, organize and retrieve critical

materials instantly—because in the courtroom, there's no time to waste. We're also focused on technologies that will help us tell a story and connect with jurors. More and more, we must meet higher expectations for seamless, visually engaging, and clearly presented information.

**Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to your younger self and/or what would you do differently?**

Looking back, I would tell my younger self to be patient and trust that there is plenty of time to achieve your goals. As lawyers, we are lucky—our careers are more like marathons than sprints. You don't have to achieve everything all at once. There will always be opportunities—another trial, another case, another chance to grow professionally. There were a couple times when I missed out on going to trial because I was having a baby (I have three pre-teen/teenage sons now). While that was professionally disappointing in the moment, I've come to appreciate the privilege of a career that offers new and exciting opportunities year after year.

Another lesson is about finding balance, which is different for each lawyer and even different for the same lawyer at different points in time. As a junior partner, I was so driven to excel that I came close to burning out. I should have embraced a reduced-hours schedule sooner, but I pressured myself to keep pushing. If I could do it again, I would remind myself that taking a step back for a while doesn't mean losing momentum—it means preserving your energy for the long run.

**Do you have a prediction on how the legal industry will evolve over the next several years?**

It is hard, if not impossible, to predict the future,

but clearly artificial intelligence tools are changing how we work. For trial firms like Keker, we expect to use the tools for data and document analysis, legal and factual research, and probably for some of the drafting of routine papers like objections and responses to discovery. Client expectations will drive adoption as firms seek a competitive edge with faster turnaround times and data-informed insights.

However, I don't think AI will drastically change the majority of the work we do here at Keker. Our lawyers' good judgment and experience will continue to have the final say in strategy and decision-making. Clients will continue to need our services and ability to deeply understand and explain complex and highly technical arguments.

**Please share with us any firm or industry initiatives that you are working on as well as the impact you hope to achieve.**

We are a trial firm with one clear objective: Take tough cases and reach the best outcomes for our clients. We are focused on ensuring that the next generation of trial lawyers serve as lead counsel in significant cases, and that we are building successful relationships with our clients. We also are focused on growing our plaintiff-side representations. We have undertaken an initiative to expand our alternative fee arrangement offerings, including more contingency options. We are different from many of our larger peers because we can be flexible and formulate arrangements, like hybrid hourly and bonus or contingent fees, that can work for clients and allow us to bet on ourselves. I've led the case teams on several of our recent plaintiff-side cases and really enjoy the creativity required and gratifying nature of that work, and I am glad the firm is growing that side of our practice.