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Caitlin Halpern of Gibbs & Bruns

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Please describe two of your most substantial, recent wins in practice.

Over the past six years, I have represented PIMCO in several matters involving residential mortgage-backed securities. The two most significant cases involved the same question of first impression: Should the price to terminate a RMBS trust and acquire its assets include or exclude deferred principal balances? In a recent California case, I briefed and solely presented summary judgment-stage argument for PIMCO and other aligned investors, securing a ruling in our favor that the trust termination price must include deferred principal balances. Soon after, I won a motion for judgment on the pleadings in a New York litigation addressing the same issue. These victories set precedent that will guide market participants for years to come.

Additionally, from 2019 to 2024, I was an integral member of the team representing Occidental Chemical Corporation (Oxy) against Texas Brine Company LLC in complex, multi-year litigation arising from the Bayou Corne Sinkhole. The sinkhole occurred when a salt mine operated by Texas Brine on Oxy's land collapsed, creating a 40-acre lake on what used to be dry land and causing extensive property damage. Texas Brine blamed Oxy for the disaster, asserting various legal theories and demanding hundreds of millions of dollars in damages. My team defended Oxy's right to arbitrate in Louisiana state court proceedings and a five-week arbitration on arbitrability, then prevailed following an eight-week arbitration on the merits. During those proceedings, I co-presented opening argument, solely argued a motion for directed verdict, and cross-examined and presented numerous witnesses.

What is the most important lesson you learned as a first-year attorney and how does it inform your practice today?

As a first-year attorney, I was extremely fortunate to clerk for an incredibly talented and thoughtful judge in the Southern District of New York. Among many other lessons, I learned to know my audience and how to adapt my communications to that audience.

My judge taught his clerks that judicial opinions are for the people and should be comprehensible by the people. After spending years analyzing law review articles and complex appellate opinions in the ivory tower of a top law school, I learned to organize ideas, explain concepts, and simplify sentences so that the court's decisions would make sense to every reader, whether that was an elite attorney, a non-lawyer client, or a pro se litigant.

These skills remain critical in my practice today. When communicating with a court, for example, I am mindful that the reader, while sophisticated, is unlikely to be as familiar with my case as I am and will need clear, concise context to understand my arguments. With clients, these skills are key to managing expectations and anticipating needs.

Even in working with my colleagues, I use these skills to ensure that more senior partners have the updates they need to fulfill their higher-level roles and that new attorneys have the guidance they need to complete tasks.

How do you define success in your practice?

For me, success means doing hard things. While results are important, a string of easy wins leads to stagnation and complacency. The truisms—that growth comes from struggle, that character is forged in adversity, and that if you're not failing, you're not taking enough risks—are common wisdom for good reason.

In my practice, success looks like working through material I do not understand, frequently involving unfamiliar subject matters. After starting out as a public defender, I was overwhelmed by my first securities case and the multi-hundred-page "Pooling and Servicing Agreements" that came with it. I've been equally intimidated by deep-dives into paleo-entomology, offshore carbon capture, and online advertising technology. Success requires taking a deep breath, breaking issues down into digestible pieces, and asking for help when I need it.

As a boutique litigator, success also means seizing opportunities typically reserved for more experienced attorneys. Early on at Gibbs & Bruns, it was thrilling to brief and argue summary judgment motions in a case with hundreds of millions at issue, litigating against men more than twice my age. More recently, it was nerve-racking but exciting to take the lead in massive cases for important clients when a partner mentor left the firm. Success consisted not only of prevailing (although the favorable outcomes were thrilling, too) but also of pushing myself beyond my comfort zone.

How would more junior lawyers on your team describe your leadership style?

I hope junior lawyers would say that I empower each person on my case teams to bring their best selves to work. As a young lawyer, I was grateful for lead attorneys who allowed me to take risks and try things—even if my approach was not what they would do and even if they thought it might flop. Although I've learned a tremendous amount from watching and speaking with more senior lawyers, I tend to learn most by doing things myself and perform best when I lean into my own personal style.

It's been thrilling to watch junior members of my teams do things I couldn't—from pitching creative strategies I'd never considered to building rapport with a judge through (situationally appropriate) jokes. In turn, our clients are well served by team members with a range of viewpoints, united by the capability and confidence to take on any task.

Who is your greatest mentor in the law and what have they taught you?

Kathy Patrick, one of the senior partners at my firm, has taught me far more than I could fit into 225 words. To highlight one of her best pieces of advice, she often says that "you have to let people be who they are." People thrive when they can be themselves and bring their unique strengths to the practice of law. As a young associate, Kathy told me that I couldn't do what she does—and that's OK, because she couldn't do what I do, either. While we have a lot to learn from older lawyers, success comes not from emulating them but from adapting their practices and skills into our own authentic ways of thinking, communicating, and leading.

For example, even in cutthroat “bet the company” litigation, “feminine” qualities like warmth and emotional intelligence are a strength, not a weakness. My case teams are dedicated and cohesive because I am invested in each person’s morale and growth opportunities. Similarly, I have a particular talent for helping nervous witnesses feel confident and prepared. And a client once commented that when I cross-examine witnesses, I make them look so dumb, but in such a nice way. That is my superpower, not something I need to change to be more like someone else.

What are you most proud of as a lawyer?

Few things are more gratifying than achieving a great outcome for a client.

In my paid matters, I recently briefed, argued, and won summary judgment-stage decisions in RMBS Trust Instruction Proceedings in California and New York. Both decisions held that the price to terminate a trust and purchase its assets must include deferred principal amounts. These test cases will ultimately affect billions of dollars of securities—and will ensure that our client, PIMCO, can provide the best possible returns for its clients, which include corporations, foundations, endowments, pension funds, and individuals around the world.

In my pro bono practice, I recently secured parole for my 13th client, reducing their collective prison time by roughly 150 years. Although each client has a compelling story, one that stands out is Kenneth, who was in prison from 1982 until 2025 for a crime he has always maintained he did not commit. During those 43 years, he avoided serious disciplinary incidents, earned his sobriety by completing substance abuse programs, and gained significant training and experience in carpentry and plumbing. Now in his 60s, Kenneth recently returned home to his surviving family members. In a true small-world coincidence, Kenneth resides with his brother, who lives in my neighborhood and frequents the same deli for eggplant parm sandwiches.

Tell us more about your most impactful pro bono work. How did it make you a better lawyer?

Parole representation has been a significant part of my pro bono practice since I joined Gibbs & Bruns. I also work with the Texas Defender Service, University of Texas Parole Project, and Susman Godfrey to recruit lawyers across Texas to provide pro bono representation to parole applicants.

In parole representation, it is impossible to sidestep the bad facts. The parole board carefully considers whether an applicant accepts responsibility for their offenses and expresses remorse. Every application therefore includes a detailed discussion of the ways my clients have broken the law and caused harm, contextualized by the life circumstances that led to the offenses and followed by discussion of how my clients have changed their lives to ensure they do not repeat the same mistakes. In my paid cases, directly confronting—rather than avoiding—the bad facts is equally co-critical to controlling the narrative and demonstrating why the outcome I advocate for is the right one.

Tell us your two favorite songs on your summer music playlist.

My husband and I are in the process of adopting two kids, ages 4 and 7, and their enthusiasm for “Tik Tok” by Kesha (“it’s party time!”) and “How You Like That” by Blackpink (“look at me, now tickle me!”) is infectious.