

Q&A with Bambo Obaro and Liz Ryan

Bambo Obaro and **Liz Ryan** are both new partners at Weil, Gotshal & Manges. Obaro offices in Silicon Valley and was welcomed into Weil's partnership in 2020, while Ryan operates from Dallas and Houston and was a partner at her former firm, revered Dallas litigation boutique Lynn Pinker, before joining Weil in March 2021. Both embody the Firm's dedication to diversity and fostering successive generations of trial talent. Obaro and Ryan speak to Benchmark editor **Michael Rafalowich** on these topics as well as trendspotting, banner cases, and their industry observations.

Can you discuss your respective ascents to partnership level? Bambo, you made partner at Weil in 2020 (Congratulations!) and Liz you were a lateral hire who made partner while at your former firm. Can you reflect on anything you did to build a case for partnership and how you executed that plan? What advice would you offer to talented senior associates who are making a push to reach this next career milestone? How has Weil supported you as partners?

On Ascent

Bambo Obaro: I knew I wanted to be a partner early on in my career. In developing my business case, I sought to understand the business dynamics at Weil, which informed my thinking on how I could contribute to the Firm as a partner. At the end of the day, every law firm is a business and it is important to keep that perspective if your goal is to one day become a part owner of the business.

Liz Ryan: Like Bambo, from the time I was a young associate I clearly stated my objective and continuously sought advice from the partners about their requirements for partnership election and ways to advance within the firm. I seized opportunities to hone my skills and deepen my experience well, both in the courtroom and in client development. I built out a network of industry and professional contacts. And when I was up for partnership, I drafted a business plan that highlighted my work and value prospect, my goals for the first three years of my partnership, and a detailed execution plan.

On Advice

LR: Dovetailing with my discussion of my ascent, first, you must state your goal. Make sure that the individuals with authority to make you a partner know partnership is your objective. It might surprise many eager associates to learn that partners do not necessarily assume that everyone wants to join their ranks.



Second, find a sponsor. I say "find" because this should be an intentional and deliberate process. A sponsor should be someone who has both decision-making power and influence within your firm, as well as an ability to generate opportunities for you to demonstrate your ability to a broader audience – beyond your practice, department, and even primary clients. Be direct with that partner; explain your goal, how you believe that partner can help you reach it, and stress that you want both their advice and leadership. But most importantly, tell them and then show them—again and again—what you can do for them and their clients, in terms of support, quality work product, and so on. In other words, when that person gives you opportunities you must shine. When the time comes, ask for that person's support and advocacy in your election to partnership.

BO: I couldn't agree more with Liz. Definitely, be emphatic about your goal. Stating your goal out loud makes you more accountable to yourself and others. It also gives others permission to talk to you about what it takes to make partner. I would also add that, like any job or career path in professional services, life as a partner can change month to month and year to year, and it's important to be available to service your clients as needed. While my job is demanding, I absolutely love coming in to the office each day, and even in few short years I've been a partner, I'm very glad I stuck with the process. Finally, as a senior

associate, it is also important to recognize that every opportunity you get to substantively work on a matter is an opportunity to build your brand with partners within the Firm and clients alike. Take advantage of the opportunities by being a resource to your colleagues and clients and providing value in your exchanges with them.

On Weil's Support and Culture

LR: As a lateral partner, Weil's partnership has been extremely welcoming and supportive. I am continuously impressed by the level of mentoring and engagement that experienced partners devote to their younger counterparts, as well as the business development coaching and opportunities afforded to Weil's younger partners.

BO: I too have felt completely supported throughout my time at Weil and even more so after becoming a partner. I have enjoyed collaborating with other partners in the Firm to develop and grow my practice and have learned a tremendous amount from more senior lawyers, who have been really generous with their time.

Weil is a truly national firm, and indeed you both are based in separate offices. What have you each observed in terms of the opportunities to collaborate as part of national teams at Weil? What are clients' expectations of these types of teams, and how does a law firm best meet them in the current environment?

BO: A majority of the matters I have handled or led are also staffed across offices – including some with Liz! Pre-pandemic, Weil already excelled at creating opportunities to collaborate this way, and as we have all seen, the technological advances made during the pandemic have only improved our ability to work together as a national firm. In staffing cases, we go where the talent is regardless of geographic location. Our litigation department, just like the other departments within the Firm, is also run nationally, which helps facilitate a more holistic approach to client service.

LR: For me, this is one area in which Weil is truly outstanding and which initially drew me to the Firm. There isn't just the opportunity to work across offices, it's really the expectation or the norm. Almost every matter I have helped lead since joining Weil has involved attorneys in at least one other office. By staffing matters across offices, we can bring the best resources to bear for our clients regardless of the attorney's location. We, and by extension our clients, have certainly benefited from the Pandemic-wrought advancements in remote work technology to minimize the burdens and costs associated with cross-office work.

Weil is also a firm that is noted for housing quite a few top trial lawyers – the firm has the distinction of having several of these recognized as our "Top 100 Trial Lawyers" and also placing as one of our "Top 20 Trial Firms." What are your perspectives on trial practice? What are your most memorable trial experiences at Weil? Have you witnessed any expressed demand for more "youth" among the trial teams from clients, and what do you think so-called next-generation trial lawyers can bring to the table?

LR: Bambo and I are lucky to practice with and learn from some of the best trial lawyers in the country, who routinely operate at levels head-and-shoulders above their courtroom adversaries. Trial practice is its own specialty, as much of our work involves skills that are not readily used in most practices, such as teaching, crafting themes and messaging, even

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tapping into subjective motivations to propel juries to act on our client's behalf. Regarding "youth," younger trial attorneys are particularly adept at seamlessly integrating technology into their courtroom work and thinking creatively about their presentations, which both clients and juries appreciate. Irrespective of age, the ability to pick up a case mere months—or even weeks—before trial is rare. I've fortunately found that ability abounds at Weil. My most memorable trial involves just that: Diane Sullivan, Chantale Fiebig, and I tried an opioid MDL case on two-months-notice almost immediately after Chantale and I joined the Firm. In fact, although we had all met virtually, we did not meet in person until we were on the ground in Cleveland for the trial. But we worked together seamlessly (they are both exceptional) and achieved a successful settlement for the client halfway through the trial.

BO: One of my most memorable trial experiences actually happened pretty early on in my career during the *O'Bannon v. NCAA* trial. In that case we represented a media company as it sought to prevent the parties from publicly disclosing certain confidential documents belonging to our client. The case garnered a lot of attention and the Oakland courtroom was packed with lawyers, reporters, and spectators throughout the trial. It was initially unclear whether I was going to have to make an appearance in the case, but in the middle of the trial, to the surprise of everyone in the courtroom, I had to raise an objection from the back of the courtroom. You could hear a pin drop when I popped out of my seat in the back of the packed courtroom and yelled out my objection. The judge called me to the podium to argue the validity of the objection and ultimately agreed that the information should not be disclosed. After the adrenaline subsided and I called my team to update them on what had happened, they informed me that reporters have been live tweeting the trial and had captured the play-by-play of my appearance. The experience was particularly memorable because of the theatrics involved in blurting out an objection from the back of a courtroom. Needless to say, the client was extremely pleased with the result.

How about developing business and meaningful relationships with clients? Can you comment on Weil's approach and/or support system regarding this? What are a few elements you think are mission-critical to

developing a successful client relationship? Are you seeing any major changes in your relationships – e.g., duration of a client’s tenure at a particular company – that have required you to change how you manage them?

LR: Like any other meaningful relationship you hope to have, a meaningful client relationship requires good communication, time investment, attention to their needs and goals, and active listening. Learn the client’s business. Ask them what issues they are facing, what keeps them up at night. Even if those do not relate directly to your practice, there is a chance you know someone who could help. Also, never miss an opportunity to do something kind or helpful for your client, even if (or perhaps, especially if) there is no business component to it.

BO: One of the things I appreciate most about Weil’s approach to business development is the recognition that it takes time to develop meaningful client relationships. Patience and consistency are two important components of business development. Building a strong and meaningful relationship takes time. You have to build on each opportunity you get with a client and consistently deliver value to the client to advance the relationship. It is also important to connect with people on a personal level. Clients like to work with people they like and get along with, so it is important to nurture the personal connections you have with clients. As I have continued to develop in my career, I have noticed a change in how clients view me and my role on cases. Clients now turn to me and trust me to lead important litigation matters for them, which is exciting.

While neither of your practices are limited to this by any means, you both seem to have ample experience with trade secrets. Was this mere coincidence or is this an example of “trendspotting” and going where you perceive the demand is strongest? What other trends or developments are you noting within the litigation community?

BO: For me, this was more of a deliberate choice. I worked on a number of trade secret cases as a young lawyer and really enjoyed them. As I became more senior, I decided to really invest in developing my substantive expertise in this area. I became, and remain, actively involved in the Sedona Conference Trade Secrets Working Group, which is a great way to stay current on significant developments in trade secret law. In the last few years, I have noticed more and more companies are starting to pay more attention to their trade secrets—both from an assertive and a defensive posture. The verdicts in trade secrets cases have continued to skyrocket, which has forced companies to pay more attention to what people are bringing in the door when they join their company. I expect this trend to continue as companies become more sophisticated with how they think about their trade secrets.

LR: I wish I could claim it was trendspotting, but it was more a function of the fact that trade secret cases frequently land in court. Fortunately, they have an added benefit of being very exciting cases. I have yet to walk away from a trade secrets case where I did not learn something entirely new and meet incredibly interesting, talented people.

Could each of you elaborate on any key (public) litigation matters you have played an active role in over the past year? In my observation of the annual dossier that Weil has presented to Benchmark, it seems that you both have been involved to some degree in cases product liability and mass tort matters an area in which Weil has historically held a pole position. What trends are you seeing in that area that are important for clients to anticipate?

BO: Right now a lot of attention is being paid to the use of public nuisance in product liability claims as we’ve seen that theory emerge in the Opioid cases. This is an area we will need to watch as appellate courts continue to weigh in on the issue. The antitrust space is also an interesting area to pay attention to right now. The FTC has made it clear that the big tech companies in Silicon Valley are on their radar and we have been seeing a lot of activity in this space.

LR: As to trends, an increase in large verdicts against corporations where the recurring theme is companies failing to follow their internal policies, which results in some perceived harm to either an individual or the community at large. For example, companies are repeatedly being held responsible—and liable for astonishingly large verdicts—for crimes either committed by their employees or on company property by non-employees when the evidence shows that the company policies were disregarded or lax.

You both exemplify a level of youthful perspective as well as diversity that many companies are demanding to see on teams handling their litigation. Many firms talk the talk, but a peek behind the curtain often reflects that this is more PR dressing than reality. Can you discuss Weil’s commitment to “walking the walk” regarding diversity, as well your contributions to creating diverse teams? How does a law firm truly demonstrate its fundamental understanding of this important aspect of legal service delivery?

LR: Weil is truly a leader in diversity efforts. From the top down, every partner with whom I have worked has stressed that inclusivity and diversity are guiding factors in terms of matter staffing, client development, associate development, and opportunity generation. Each pitch and matter on which I have worked has been led by a diverse team specifically selected for the engagement, and I think that outcome—not just the desire, but actually offering clients diverse teams of subject-matter experts—is the true mark of a firm aligning with its clients’ current diversity goals.

BO: As a member of the Firm’s diversity committee, part of my role is to make sure Weil does indeed walk the walk when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion. I am proud to say that I think the Firm is extremely committed to improving the opportunities and experiences of all of our diverse lawyers and staff. This commitment comes from top. Our Executive Partner, Barry Wolf, is particularly focused on diversity and his leadership in this regard has enabled a lot of the inroads we’ve been able to make as a Firm. There is of course still much work to be done by Weil and in the broader legal industry, but I am encouraged by the progress we’ve making as a Firm.

Would each of you care to give a shout-out to any other partners (within Weil as well as at other firms) that are roughly of your vintages and worthy of recognition?

LR: Aside from present company (Bambo is an outstanding attorney), Chantale Fiebig, a fellow lateral partner who is a skilled strategist with a commanding trial presence, and Anish Desai, a patent litigator who is coming off a spectacular trial victory in North Carolina.

BO: Liz Ryan, Luna Barrington, and Jessica Falk are three of my Complex Commercial Litigation partners at Weil that come to mind. They are each excellent attorneys and I always enjoying working and collaborating with each of them.