

WSGR Partner Wendy Huang Waszmer and the Importance of Meaning, Relationships, and Mental Space



Growing up in the small, rural town of Storrs, Connecticut, Wendy Huang Waszmer never imagined she would spend her adult life as a big city attorney.

"It never occurred to me to aspire to be a lawyer," she says. "I figured I'd probably get a Ph.D., because that is what everyone else in my family had done."

That perspective changed during a college internship with a local public defender. Though Wendy wasn't contemplating law school at the time, she was interested in community and social work, and the internship seemed like a good way to get exposure to the field. She worked in the "lockup," interviewing individuals who wanted to qualify for a public defender.

One interview in particular left an indelible impression.

"There was a young man in Connecticut's 'Supermax' prison who'd been convicted of several murders," Wendy recalls. "He was accused of knifing someone in the throat with a shard from a cafeteria tray on the one day he was allowed into the general inmate population. But when I interviewed him, he was incredibly intelligent and articulate, and asked questions about things like the Emancipation Proclamation. You would never guess the charge against him if you didn't already know.

"I found the dynamic very interesting," she continues. "He clearly felt he had a defense for the assault. The person who I worked for was going to defend him, and I could get behind it because this was meaningful. He was a convicted murderer, but this was a worthwhile cause."

The encounter had such a significant impact on Wendy that it would become the subject of her law school application essay. And sure enough, after graduating *summa cum laude* from the College of William and Mary, she attended Georgetown University Law Center with an eye toward working in the public sector.

Ultimately, she decided to start her career in private practice upon graduating *magna cum laude* from Georgetown Law, joining Hogan & Hartson in Washington, D.C. As a junior associate, her practice focused on antitrust investigations and some litigation. Among her mentors were several senior women antitrust partners, including Christine Varney and Sharis Pozen, who would later help shape the trajectory of her career.

After two years at Hogan, Wendy took a federal clerkship with the Honorable Richard J. Leon of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, with whom she remains close today. It marked the start of a distinguished career in government service.

Following the completion of her clerkship, Wendy served as an Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Civil Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, where she appeared as lead counsel in trials and hearings in more than 50 federal district court cases and numerous appeals.

Then, in 2009, Wendy received a call from Sharis Pozen, one of her mentors from Hogan, presenting her with the opportunity of a lifetime.

Christine Varney had been nominated by President Obama to be the Assistant Attorney General for the Department of Justice's Antitrust Division. Sharis became her Chief of Staff and later also served as Acting Assistant Attorney General.

"It had been more than five years since we worked together, though we had kept in touch," Wendy remembers. "And now these

two powerful, charismatic, amazing women were asking me to join them. It was definitely one of the most memorable moments in my career."

Wendy went on to serve in several leadership and trial counsel roles for the DOJ in both New York and Washington, D.C. As Assistant Chief of the New York office of the DOJ's Antitrust Division, she supervised federal trials and both criminal and civil investigations. Wendy also was a liaison with federal and state enforcement and regulatory agencies in joint and parallel antitrust and fraud investigations. In addition, she served as counsel to the Assistant Attorney General of the Antitrust Division, advising on enforcement policy matters.

"It was an incredible privilege to serve as a DOJ prosecutor, and I felt that every case—whether high-profile or not—involved a significant level of responsibility and intensity," Wendy says. "My fellow DOJ attorneys, many of whom became lifelong friends, felt the exact same way about public service."

It was during her tenure at the DOJ that Wendy worked with Jamillia Ferris, now a fellow antitrust partner and close friend at WSGR. Jamillia, who had also been a Hogan associate mentored by Christine and Sharis, later became Chief of Staff in the Antitrust Division and a lead investigative lawyer at the Federal Communications Commission.

After eight years at the DOJ, Wendy left the agency in 2013 to become a litigation partner in the New York office of King and Spalding. Meanwhile, after Jamillia joined WSGR in 2015, she reached out to Wendy about the firm's globally recognized antitrust practice.

"I knew Jamillia, as well as Mark Rosman, who had built WSGR's cartel practice after more than 20 years at the DOJ," Wendy says. "I remember Scott Sher describing the group over lunch, and I thought, 'I have to be part of this team.'"

Strategies for Success

Wendy offers this advice to new attorneys:

Find the meaning in your work.

“Because lawyering is so demanding, it’s important to be into it, to have something that you are actually interested in and motivated to do. Otherwise, it will just be a grind. I always say to the associates I work with, ‘Can you get behind this case? Are you interested in this?’ At WSGR, the answer is almost always yes, because we represent innovators and cutting-edge companies doing really cool things.”

Prioritize peer relationships.

“When I was a newer attorney, I really cared about knowing the associates and the Assistant U.S. Attorneys who were at my level, and I built a network of those peers. That support network was important to my success—and is probably why I’ve stayed in the legal profession. I still have friends and peers, like Jamillia Ferris, who have been there the entire time and shared my experiences, wins, and losses.”

Seek out feedback.

“Law is hard, and it’s such a high-speed environment that you’re not going to get better just by watching. You advance because you get constructive feedback from people who are more knowledgeable than you. Sometimes that feedback is that you weren’t the best that day, which is good to know and you’ll adjust, learn, and do it better the next time.

“We should ask for feedback from our clients, our colleagues, and others outside of the firm when we can. And it’s important to be assertive and confident in asking for feedback. This applies to attorneys of all experience levels, including women and diverse attorneys who want to get to the next level in their practices. They need to raise their hands and ask, ‘Hey, could you help me improve?’ and then be willing to hear the answer.”

In April 2017, Wendy joined the firm’s New York office as a partner in the antitrust practice. She focuses on representing companies and individual clients in high-stakes antitrust and other government investigations and federal court litigation. Because of her background in large-scale, cross-border government investigations, she handles a significant amount of interdisciplinary work, including collaborating with lawyers in the privacy, internet litigation, and white collar practices.

“One day I might be defending an individual client under criminal antitrust investigation by the DOJ and—this is literally happening now—another day I’m appearing in federal court in an antitrust or other litigation and the case is going to trial,” Wendy says.

A diversity of practice is one of the things Wendy enjoys most about working at WSGR. Another is the diversity of the firm’s practitioners, not only in terms of the relatively high numbers of women and minority attorneys, but also the diversity in points of view. “You are never going to hear, ‘There is one way to do this case,’” Wendy explains. “More often, you are going to hear many voices chiming in with ideas, often challenging whether and why we would ‘do it the way it has always been done.’”

While in government, Wendy benefitted from real opportunities for women and minority trial lawyers, but when interviewing at major law firms, she was astonished at the lack of diversity at the senior levels. She notes that firms seem to be doing better in the early stages of legal careers, but are challenged in retaining diverse attorneys beyond the five-to-ten-year mark. In her view, one key factor is a lack of business training.

“Firms need to involve diverse lawyers in getting, advising, and retaining clients and in the finances that govern private practice, and WSGR does that better than others,” Wendy says. “In my experience, a lot of resources are focused—and rightly so—on making sure diverse lawyers are the best technical lawyers

from a skills perspective, but there’s work to be done to engage them in the business of law. That’s how attorneys develop into equity partners—someone has taught you about how the law firm operates as a business that serves clients.”

The challenge of increasing diversity across the legal industry is one that Wendy thinks about, having served until recently as the Diversity Chair of the NY State Bar Association’s Antitrust Law Section. However, the vast majority of Wendy’s time outside of work is not spent on anything related to the law.

“I’m pretty unplugged in my personal life, meaning I can go quickly from being very intense and Type A about my work to, say, cooking spicy tomato sauce for eight hours. I’m incredibly low-key and even forgetful during the weekends. My husband actually wishes I’d be more focused. And I sleep a ton,” she laughs.

In fact, Wendy makes it a priority to have outside interests. She loves cooking, relaxing outdoors, and pursuing hobbies that she’s “not currently great at,” such as golf and fly fishing. She also spends a lot of time with her family and a close-knit group of friends “who have nothing to do with my work.”

In her view, creating a sense of mental separation between one’s professional life and personal life is a necessity. “It’s so important for lawyers to have that mental space, some separation from the job,” she says. “And even when you’re given that space, it’s hard to take it when you are dedicated to your work, but it’s crucial. This job is both exciting and demanding, and you need the ability to recharge your batteries and get some perspective. The associates I work with, when we’re in the middle of a busy case, I ask them if they went for a run, if they slept enough, if they are planning to take vacation this summer. I want them to make it a habit to take that space. And that’s entirely the culture at WSGR, which I appreciate.”



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