

Delivering Quality

An Interview with Amy W. Schulman,
Partner, DLA Piper



Amy W. Schulman

EDITORS' NOTE Amy Schulman cochairs DLA Piper's mass tort/class action practice and currently leads three multi-district litigations. She represents major pharmaceutical companies and acts as lead outside litigation counsel for a major food manufacturer. Schulman sits on the firm's Global Board and is a member of the Executive and Policy Committees of the firm. She also sits on the boards of directors of the Brooklyn Academy of Music and Equal Justice Works.

COMPANY BRIEF DLA Piper (www.dlapiper.com) employs 3,600 lawyers in 25 countries and 64 offices throughout the United States, the United Kingdom, continental Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. It has leading practices in corporate, finance, human resources, litigation, real estate, regulatory and legislative, tax, and technology, media, and communications law.

What lies ahead for DLA Piper's mass tort practice?

More of the same, I hope. We value the involvement we have with our clients and hope for that to continue. And it does not seem that the level of scrutiny pharmaceutical companies and members of other highly regulated industries experience is diminishing. Even as the precise contours of this practice change, I don't see our mass tort practice going away.

Has your practice become more complicated in recent years?

The issues have changed, because the

world has changed. In some ways, class action and mass tort litigation is an artifact of the world in which we live. The premium that is placed on disclosure and the perceived need for companies to communicate clearly and transparently are very high. Perfect transparency, however, may be an unrealistic expectation. Very few things in life – and very few complicated things in particular – are fully transparent. Often there will be an inadvertent and innocent mismatch between the information driving a decision and the information conveyed. That mismatch or misalignment is where litigation often arises. In defending a case or a series of cases, you are retelling a narrative in the current moment, trying to answer the following questions: Could I have known? Should I have known? Did I willfully not know? You will try to impart that history fairly, but it's hard to disentangle your current state of knowledge. So smart companies are trying to embed a message of evolutionary thinking into their communications.

Are many of your cases truly international?

Yes, in part because regulators in Europe and the United States don't always have a uniform set of standards. Documents are produced around the world, and privacy laws are different. A client can be required to produce documents in the United States as part of a litigation that, under the privacy laws of a European Union member state, that client is not allowed to produce. And most clients that are truly multinational now make decisions on a global basis. So if you're looking at a worldwide marketing plan or a worldwide approach to a set of regulatory imperatives, you'll find actions have components that reside in different places around the world.

With that in mind, can only large global law firms succeed in today's world?

At the end of the day, I still believe that clients hire lawyers, not law firms, so small firms can be a piece of an overall strategy. That said, hiring a law firm for important and complicated matters is hard without the scale and scope. It's an enormous help to a client to know that, whatever the timetable, we can get it done. We have the ability to marshal resources around the world, and that's a tremendous service to be able to offer our clients.

Is your own work predominantly focused on large engagements?

I work on a range of different cases. I tend

to have more than a few household names as clients. Undoubtedly, it's hard to make sense out of hiring me for a \$50,000 contract dispute. But a new client may still try me out on smaller matters. The scale of the work we do means we tend to be involved in things that require a lot of thought and the ability to marshal resources and skills, but I have plenty of cases no one has heard of. I'm not particularly drawn to the fact that my clients' problems are in the newspapers. In fact, that often is one of the more challenging things about it.

You're fairly involved in the firm's efforts to foster diversity and inclusiveness.

We have an amazing group of women at the firm. That's very important to me. In my line of work, I am often the only woman – or one of only a few women – in the room, and I don't like that. I have a firsthand experience in what it feels like to be outside of the majority culture, and I think it's important that the leaders of the modern large law firm always be conscious to guard against an insider-outsider mentality. As a small example, all of the women litigators in the New York office recently met at my house for dinner. It was an incredible evening.

Some of the firm's clients must work only with the famous Amy Schulman.

There are members of my team who can do some things far better than I can, and my job is to help clients connect with those people who are true stars in their own right. My favorite part of what I do is working directly with clients, and I don't think I've yet been in a situation in which I needed to be at a meeting, argue a motion, or take a deposition and couldn't make the schedule work.

What are your key priorities for the firm in the coming years?

The single most important thing any firm can do is deliver quality to its clients. I'm relentless about quality. I still edit nearly everything that leaves our offices. I'm a nut about that stuff, but quality goes beyond written excellence; it also means being responsive. If clients ask for something that seems nearly impossible or even unnecessary, that's irrelevant; you need to get it for them. That doesn't mean being so compliant that you don't try to work with clients – at the right moment – to explain why there might be a more efficient approach to a question or issue. Bottom line, though – our job is to make it easier on the people who come to us for help. ●