

## 5 MINUTES WITH... MADELINE LEONG

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**Madeline Leong heads WFW's Hong Kong office. Her practice focuses on asset finance, project finance, leasing structures, ECA financings, structured finance, debt restructuring and work-outs, with particular experience in the transportation, natural resources and energy sectors. Described in legal directories as 'outstanding,' 'fantastic' and a 'star' here Madeline talks about her career and managing a busy office.**

**Q:** Tell us about your career to date. What were you doing before you joined Watson Farley & Williams?

**A:** I was a finance partner with another law firm in HK.

**Q:** Did you always want to be a lawyer?

**A:** No, it was never a plan. I knew what I didn't want to do but I didn't know what I wanted to do. I applied to law school on a whim and when I got in, I decided to have a go – and really enjoyed it.

**Q:** Tell us a bit about your career path with the firm. What led you to your specialisation?

**A:** After I graduated from University, I trained in Perth, Australia (where I grew up). I enjoyed banking and finance so it made sense to stay with this. In the beginning I was involved in a lot of project finance work but now it's mainly asset/maritime finance transactions. Having worked in HK for a few years I moved to Singapore and joined WFW on a part-time basis. WFW was a good platform for asset/maritime finance work and very importantly, the firm was willing to hire me on a part-time basis. I took on this role mainly because it fitted around my young children. There was no big or fervent ambition to pursue a busy legal career but when my business development efforts paid off and the business grew, one thing led to another. Before I knew it, I was a busy part-time partner, working on a flexible arrangement for WFW Singapore. After seven years I moved to WFW HK and started working full time (as the children were by then a lot older).

**Q:** Tell us about your highlights as head of the Hong Kong office – how do you juggle your legal work and management responsibilities?

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A: It is very rewarding and satisfying to see the office grow in terms of headcount, culture and market share. The HK office first opened its doors in 2012 with only five lawyers and two business support staff. Today we have about 30 lawyers and more than 20 business support colleagues. We have also moved to bigger premises and developed a good working environment. Having the right support in the office and being organised really helps me successfully juggle my legal and management roles.

Q: What are three things we should know about the team?

A: We are very (1) diverse (we have many different nationalities, Singaporean, Greek, Vietnamese, Korean, Australian, English, Filipino, Chinese) (2) dynamic (always looking at ways to grow and improve) and (3) collegiate (there is a great team atmosphere).

Q: What challenges do your clients face in their sectors and how does the team respond?

A: Keeping costs under control, making decisions and completing deals quickly – we try to respond to this by enhancing and focusing on our efficiency in order to provide quality and value-added service to distinguish ourselves in this competitive market.

Q: The Hong Kong office was named Firm of the Year 2017-18 for both Shipping and Restructuring & Insolvency by China Business Law Journal and our Asia practice was named Shipping and Maritime Firm of the Year 2018 at the Asia Legal Awards. To what do you attribute this success?

A: A supportive, enthusiastic and dedicated team of people.

Q: What do you think is the most significant barrier to female leadership? What advice would you give to women at the beginning of their careers?

A: I think law is a career where there is no significant barrier for females who are good at what they do. Advice? Maybe not to overthink things or make plans too far into the future, just plan for the next couple of years and see how it goes. If you enjoy what you do, it is likely that recognition and success will follow plus (hopefully) it will not feel too much like hard work but just a natural progression and pursuit. Enjoy life – work hard and play hard.

Q: How would you describe the culture of Watson Farley & Williams?

A: Young, dynamic and flexible.

Q: Do you see value in an alumni programme; why do you think it is important to maintain connections with past colleagues?

A: I think there is great value in such a programme. It's a fantastic opportunity to forge mutually valuable business relationships as well as to help people keep in touch and continue to feel part of the WFW community.

Q: What do you like to do when you are not working?

A: Cooking, painting, reading, skiing and playing the odd game of squash or tennis (but I am not very good at it).

## KEY CONTACTS

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