

ALUMNI INTERVIEW: FLORENCE HERARD

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Florence left the firm while she was expecting her second child and moved in-house, to Citi. “It was initially a small legal team and they offered me a job-share – quite pioneering for a large bank at that time – which fitted in perfectly with my commitments at home.” 16 years later, Florence is now at BNY Mellon and is enjoying her new role.

“Working in-house is quite different. The bank is your client. It is easier to absorb the culture and the business and this is so important, as to be an effective lawyer you also need to really understand both aspects and get to the nub of the issue. Working in-house just gets you to this point faster.” And are there any downsides compared to being a lawyer in private practice? “You miss the breadth of supporting expertise and bespoke IT systems.”

Florence likes people and is curious to find out what makes them tick. This empathetic streak has been and continues to be useful in her roles both at Citi and BNY Mellon, working with the team in London and with similar teams in the bank’s key hubs around the world. She firmly believes that, for her, the experience of bringing up her two boys has given her greater confidence in dealing with people in any position and in any situation.

Do barriers to female leadership still exist? Florence believes they do. “Things have improved a lot but you still notice that in the really top jobs, men are still disproportionally represented.” She thinks that women don’t always help themselves. “I think we censor ourselves more and are less willing to push ourselves forward until we feel absolutely certain, whereas men display more confidence regardless.” Florence is encouraged by the increasing move for women to network with one another more closely, leveraging off one another in a way that has traditionally been done with such ease by men.

Florence remembers working at the firm with fondness, from the early days working with colleagues like Jim Surgeoner, Angharad Harris, Richard Dibble, Mike Vernell, Carolyn Thomas, Louine McKisack, Debbie Chao, Harriet Mellor and Katerina de Marmiers, many with whom she has remained in contact.

In her spare time Florence is an avid reader and enjoys cooking (she may have a shot at MasterChef one of these days!). She is also a serious Arsenal fan and is proud to have this (literally) set in stone. In pride of place at the Emirates Stadium, on the back of the statue of Thierry Henri, a supporter’s plaque reads ‘COYG’ (Come on you Gunners) ‘Florence, Paul, Patrick and Charlie.’