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The Agility of the Law

By Jan Jaben-Eilon

Lawrence & Bundy LLC's tagline pretty much sums up the new law firm – “Agile Client Service.” Those three words, taken together and separately, explain why Allegra Lawrence-Hardy and Thomas Bundy left a major law firm, and turned down significant offers to join other law firms, to launch their own firm earlier this year.

At Sutherland Asbill & Brennan – where she co-headed its business and commercial litigation team and the firm's labor and employment team, helping Fortune 500 clients navigate an array of complex commercial and employment matters – Lawrence-Hardy says she saw an opportunity to handle large class action cases with the agility of a smaller firm and a more creative fee schedule. “We launched Lawrence & Bundy to fill a void in the market to respond to what large clients increasingly desire,” she says.

According to Bundy, who worked with Lawrence-Hardy as a partner in Sutherland, handling a variety of commercial litigation matters that stretched across many litigation areas, “We took what we did at Sutherland and put it on a platform clients want – a platform agile enough to respond to clients' increasing need for creative legal solutions at competitive rates. We cut through the red tape far too often associated with large law firms, returning the focus to the clients' needs.”

Shortly after Lawrence-Hardy and Bundy opened their firm's doors, they were joined by John Lewis Jr., global chief diversity officer at The Coca-Cola Company.

“John brings his in-house perspective and helps us understand how to best serve our clients from our clients' perspective,” says Lawrence-Hardy.

“I view our work as outside counsel from the perspective of an institutional client. I have worked with many great law firms throughout the years,” says Lewis. “I know what top lawyers do for their clients to deliver a high touch client experience. There are many very good technical lawyers out there so simply being good at the law was not differentiating for me as a client. Firms tended to do better with us when they sought to understand our company's business and anticipate specific pain points for their in-house partner. Legal problems do not happen in a vacuum and companies do not exist to litigate. Firms can (and must) be better business partners, especially at a time of increasing transparency. Clients will continue to drive a revolution in the delivery of legal services demanding transparency and increased leveraging of technology.”

“Clients expect learning agility and a solutions-based approach to the work. Finally, clients seek outside lawyers able to craft creative, value-based fee structures tailored to their needs. The marketplace is evolving rapidly away from one size fits

Allegra Lawrence-Hardy

Bill Adler Photography



“We launched Lawrence & Bundy to fill a void in the market ...”

all, commoditized approaches to the work. Some large law firms, at times, tended to be less agile and less flexible in the face of these macro changes, in my experience,” he says.

According to Lawrence-Hardy – and most economists – the world changed as it struggled through the recent shattering recession. “We can help chart a new course that's responsive to our clients' needs,” she says.

That economic earthquake, the partners believe, offered an opportunity for a firm “that is agile enough to respond to clients' changing needs in the new landscape,” explains Lawrence-Hardy. “Our emphasis is on client service and the attorney-client relationship.” Or, as Lewis points out, “Clients don't hire law firms. They hire lawyers. It's a very personal decision.”

“This sounds ambitious,” admits Lewis. “This is not about just starting your grandpa's law firm. We acknowledge that the world in which we practice as lawyers is



John Lewis, Jr.



Thomas Bundy

rapidly evolving. The 21st century attorney must be a global citizen with a sense of intellectual curiosity and high cultural intelligence. We aspire to be a global law firm, not necessarily in size, but in perspective.”

Already the firm has offices in Atlanta and Washington, D.C. “We have clients around the country. It’s not as important where the firm is based, but rather how quickly we can respond to or get to the client. From a client’s point of view, agility is

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the threshold for excellent client service,” says Bundy.

Lawrence-Hardy says the new firm’s biggest challenge is to manage opportunities. “We have to stay focused on our values,” she says. “We address the same issues as large law firms, intelligent growth,” adds Bundy, “not necessarily growth for growth’s sake.”

When Lawrence-Hardy and Bundy left

Sutherland, much of their litigation team and staff came with them to the new firm. “We are proud of the lawyers who both came with us and re-joined our team. We have super stars who embraced our vision, and we are already up to 10 lawyers,” she says. “We’re hiring the best talent and we are very excited to mentor young lawyers. We want to invest in the next generation of leaders. All three of us are very intentional about mentoring because we’ve been mentored so well by both lawyers and others outside the legal profession.”

Indeed, Bundy recalls that his high school football coach had been a lawyer at a major law firm. “He left a partnership to become a teacher. That had a real influence on me,” he says. He later went on to graduate from Howard University School of Law before joining Sutherland in 2000 and being promoted to partner in 2007. While there, he served on the firm’s diversity and hiring committees.

He has been recognized by many of his peers, receiving awards like the Star of the Quarter Award from the American Bar Association, and the Disability Rights Section Award for Excellence from the Washington Lawyers Committee for Civil

Rights and Urban Affairs.

“We want to be deliberate in growing the next generation of lawyers.”

For Lewis, it was less about becoming a lawyer. In high school, he participated in an internship program sponsored by his local congressman. When he flew up to the nation’s capital, it was one of his first ever plane rides. Through that experience, he saw law as a way to lead. “I saw lawyers as thought leaders, change agents and community leaders. There was an intellectual rigor and camaraderie in the law.”

Lewis earned his law degree from George Washington University Law School. After law school, he worked as a commercial litigator for more than a decade in Washington, D.C., Kansas City and Atlanta. He came to Atlanta to join a boutique commercial law firm and was there when Coca-Cola offered him an opportunity as litigation counsel in 2002. “It was a wonderfully transformative experience.”

As global head of litigation, Lewis led a team of lawyers in broad based litigation

AT A GLANCE

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Investigations
Compliance

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Cicely Barber, Executive Director
Ersula Butler, Practice Administrator

Community Involvement

Atlanta Botanical Garden
Atlanta Girls' School
Children's Museum of Atlanta
City of Atlanta Board of Ethics
Georgia Legal Services Foundation
Girl Scouts of Greater Atlanta
Leadership Institute for Women of Color Attorneys
Private Bank of Buckhead
Zoo Atlanta
Leadership Atlanta
Leadership Georgia

Honors

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Atlanta Business League, Atlanta's Top 100 Black Women of Influence
Benchmark Litigation
The Best Lawyers in America
Chambers USA
Chief Justice Leah Sears Award for Distinction in the Profession
Gate City Bar Foundation, A. T. Walden Outstanding Attorney
Georgia Super Lawyers
Georgia Trend Magazine, Legal Elite
National Alumnae Association of Spelman College, Community Service Award
State Bar of Georgia, Commitment to Equality Award
Women Looking Ahead Magazine, Women of the Year for Law and Justice

and litigation avoidance/counseling practice in a host of areas. Since that early plane ride to Washington, he has handled matters on the ground in more than 30 of the 200-plus countries where Coca-Cola does business.

Beyond practice, Lewis is a past chair of the city of Atlanta Board of Ethics and founder of Coca-Cola's award-winning legal division diversity council, which created a supplier diversity program for minority- and women-owned law firms seeking to represent the company, a summer internship program for the legal division and a recognition program that measured large firms on gender and multicultural representation within their teams on Coke matters.

Lewis wants to provide transformative opportunities for other young lawyers. "We want to be deliberate in growing the next generation of lawyers. If we were doctors, you might think of us as a teaching hospital. Many people invested in us along the way. It is our obligation to pay that forward."

Likewise, Lawrence-Hardy says she had many role models, starting with her parents, who are both scientists. Only her uncle served as a lawyer. She is a graduate of Spelman College, where she was a third generation magna cum laude, and Yale Law School. She joined Sutherland in 1997 after clerking for a year for Judge Susan Black of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit, in Jacksonville, Florida. Lawrence-Hardy credits Black as one of her most influential mentors. One of the most important pieces of advice Black gave her was to seek out mentors at Sutherland.

In 2004, she was made partner. She chaired the firm's diversity committee for eight years, was the longest-serving member of the firm's hiring committee, and the youngest member of the firm's executive committee. She was also the founder and architect of the Sutherland Scholars program, a summer pre-law school boot camp offered at no cost to students from historically black colleges and universities.

Her wide-ranging experience and reputation has placed her name on many "best of" and "who's who" lists. In addition, she is a fellow in the Litigation Counsel of America, an invitation-only trial lawyer honorary society that represents less than one-half of one percent of American lawyers. Fellows are selected based upon excellence and accomplishments in litigation, trial work and superior ethical reputation.

Lawrence-Hardy emphasizes that while the lawyers in her firm are litigators, they also help clients with litigation avoidance. "We want to provide a total solution to our clients. Sometimes that means serving as gateway to other professionals to address the whole picture."

Lewis points out that in most instances with cases, below the "iceberg" one can find a "lot of coaching, training, counseling and investigation to help avoid litigation. Much of the work I've done at Coke was about the preventive side of managing business risks. When issues do arise, business leaders ask lawyers how to solve a problem. They do not ask a legal question. They simply want to know, instead, how to manage the risks, whether financial or reputational as well as the disruptive impact that disputes can have on the business."

According to Lewis, joining Lawrence-Hardy and Bundy is the "culmination of my career. In the early discussions about joining the firm we focused on what the picture of success would be. The challenge is to make the right choices that place us in the path of that picture."

All three attorneys plan to meet the challenges of the new firm with an agility that focuses on their clients' needs. "Working with my two exceptional partners, and our extremely talented team, makes it exciting to take on this new challenge," says Lawrence-Hardy.