

How I Made Office Managing Partner: 'I Have Built Great Connections and Can Work With Different Personality Types,' Says Kristi Blackwell of Tyson & Mendes

"Be present. Cherish each moment. Take time to celebrate the wins!"

By Tasha Norman

Kristi Blackwell, 39, Tyson & Mendes, San Diego

Job title: Branch managing partner—San Diego.

Practice area: General liability, professional liability, personal injury, products liability, premises liability, coverage, and complex litigation.

Law school and year of graduation: California Western School of Law, 2007.

How long have you been at the firm? Fourteen years.

How long were you a partner at the firm? Eight years. I made office managing partner in 2021.

Were you a partner at another firm before joining your present firm? I started my career in 2008 as a part-time law clerk for Tyson & Mendes, and never left. I worked my way up to associate, then became the firm's third-ever partner (after founders Bob Tyson and Pat

Mendes) in 2014, then equity and branch managing partner in 2021.

What do you think was the deciding point for the firm in making you office managing partner?

I think it can be attributed to a number of factors. I have deep knowledge of the firm's internal structure and culture and have always felt a strong commitment to advancing the firm's goals and ideals. I have also built great connections with other team leaders across the firm and am able to work with all different personality types. Effective verbal and written communication skills are also important.

As office managing partner what are your key responsibilities and what challenges do you face in your role? The role comes with a lot of responsibilities, from distributing caseloads and creating successful connections between our insurance carrier clients and the teams that would be the best fit for



Kristi Blackwell
Courtesy Photo

their cases, to ensuring everyone has the resources they need to perform at the highest level. I also work with the other partners to help develop and implement firm policies that will impact all 300+ Tyson & Mendes attorneys and staff.

It is also my job to represent the core values of the firm and create a positive working environment for our San Diego team. This means making myself accessible to other attorneys and staff, being a listening

ear for those in need, and trying to inspire everyone to be the best versions of themselves.

With nearly everyone still working remotely (we made the firmwide decision to make returning to the office completely optional), communication can be difficult, and people can end up feeling isolated. No matter where they are, we work to ensure everyone feels like they are part of a common goal and are valued at the firm.

What's the best piece of advice you can give to someone who wants to rise up the ranks to firm leadership? Work hard, show you care, and develop relationships with other leaders of the firm.

Who had the greatest influence on your career and helped propel you to managing partner?

Founding partners Bob Tyson and Pat Mendes: I feel very fortunate to have started my career at Tyson & Mendes and learn from two of the best and brightest in the business.

Mina Miserlis is another equity partner at our firm. She is an incredible lawyer and mentor and has been my sounding board for many years.

Knowing what you know now, what would you tell your younger self? Be present. Cherish each moment. Take time to celebrate the wins!

As a law firm leader, what impact would you like to have on your firm and/or the legal industry as a whole? For the legal industry, being a good person and good attorney are not mutually exclusive. I want to be an example of how possible it is to show respect and dignity to those



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opposite to you while still zealously advocating for your client.

What lessons, if any, did you learn in 2020/2021 (the core COVID-19 years). We proved we are capable of providing excellent legal services while working remotely, but the human element is irreplaceable. We are always looking for new ways to connect and engage people—both clients and staff—while working remotely.

What three key words would you like to focus on for 2022. Inspire, collaborate, achieve.