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Nov 5

BDP International's chief legal officer, Catherine Muldoon, has found a way to combine her profession — law — with her passion: advocacy.

By Matt Alderton

RIKER DANZIG SCHERER HYLAND PERRETTI LLP

TENACIOUS CONFIDENT RESPECTED

"Working with Catherine has been both a privilege and a pleasure. She is the consummate professional: diligent, informed and an expert in her field. We look forward to our continuing relationship with Catherine and BDP!"

Marc D'Angiolillo, Partner, Riker Danzig Scherer Hyland & Perretti LLP

"I never imagined myself a mediator," says Muldoon, whose definition of *justice* probably aligns more closely with Wonder Woman than Nancy Grace. "I imagined myself more of an advocate. That's what led me, I think, to become a lawyer — the idea of fighting for people who couldn't fight for themselves."

"I NEVER IMAGINED MYSELF A MEDIATOR. I IMAGINED MYSELF MORE OF AN ADVOCATE. THAT'S WHAT LED ME... TO BECOME A LAWYER."

**Advocate or Attorney?**  
Muldoon has always felt that fight. She recalls, for instance, scrutinizing images of foreign cultures as a child, looking for signs of shared humanity.  
"I was fascinated at a very young age with social studies," continues Muldoon, who got her bachelor's degree in international studies from Johns Hopkins University. "I really liked looking

at photographs — looking at what people wore, what they ate, what the details were of their everyday lives — and always made the connection that we're all just people. As different as we were, I always felt there was a thread of similarity. Like we could be friends."

The traits that make people good lawyers rarely make them good friends. Although Muldoon spent approximately eight years at law firms out of law school, therefore, it should come as no surprise that she didn't feel at home in them.

"At law firms I always had dual masters, the client and the partner board, and they weren't always aligned," Muldoon says. "So as I got involved in the culture of law firms I decided I would be better suited for an in-house counsel position."

*Alignment* is what attracted Muldoon to corporate law in the first place. Although criminal and family law might seem a better choice for a self-described "advocate," multinational corporations through mergers and acquisitions (M&A) engage in a unique kind of bridge building: By aligning their global operations with strategic goals, they unite disparate employees in pursuit of shared missions, visions and values.

"Engaging in M&A work across borders, I thought, would ultimately be the best way to reach out to different cultures," Muldoon says.

If doing M&A work was the best way to traverse cultures, a global logistics company was the perfect vehicle. When she found out BDP was looking for an in-house attorney, therefore, Muldoon jumped: As it turns out, she'd previously worked for BDP as an executive trainee, prior to law school. When she heard about the job, she called her former boss and requested an interview. She didn't get the job, but learned the value of initiative by calling the company afterward to ask for constructive criticism.

"I was so disappointed," Muldoon recalls, "but I had the courage to pick up the phone afterwards and say, 'This is the kind of job I want; what are the things I need to improve to make me a better candidate next time?'"

A year later, BDP called Catherine and advised her that she got the job. "Don't burn any bridges, because you never know," Muldoon advises.

### Helping the Business

Muldoon always liked helping people. When she joined BDP in 2002 as general counsel, U.S., however, she found out she liked helping the business, too.

"I definitely consider myself a partner to the business," says Muldoon, who became chief global counsel in 2004 and chief legal officer in 2006. "That's who I want to be, and that's who the company wants me to be."

Although she assists BDP with everything from employment issues to contracts to compliance, Muldoon's chief responsibility is M&A, as the company has grown big, fast due to an aggressive acquisition schedule.

"When I started, we had a handful of offices around the world. Now we work in 114 countries," says Muldoon, who oversees not only M&A transactions, but also post-merger integration, which requires as much cultural competence as it does legal. Muldoon's tip for developing both: Hire local counsel. "I've taken it upon myself, when I need outside assistance, to work with smaller law firms that are a little more focused on the local culture so that along the way I can learn something."

### 'Yes' Woman

Initially, when BDP was engaged in an acquisition, Muldoon was brought in at the end, to dot the Is and cross the Ts. Now, however, she participates from day one.

up close and personal: Q&A

IF YOU WERE NOT A LAWYER, WHAT WOULD YOU BE?

An architect. I enjoy architecture. I think it's fascinating. Not necessarily the beautiful part, but the technical part. It would be really interesting to make something work in a really mathematical way. I've always been really impressed with people who can do that.

HOW DO YOU RELAX?

I'm very athletic. I run. I have two boys, 12 and 13, and they are incredibly good athletes. We all have that competitive nature in us. We belong to a club, so we'll go play basketball or swim or go for a run on the track. That's the way our family unwinds, we go to the gym.

WHERE'S YOUR FAVORITE PLACE TO VISIT?

Paris. Not only is it incredibly beautiful, but every time I go it seems to be for a really exciting family event. My husband flew me there as a surprise on my 30th birthday. It was very romantic. I just recently went back with my children. We went to see the French Open. It's been nice to see the city at different times in my life where I could appreciate different aspects of it. It just has such good memories for me.

"I now sit at the table from the beginning," Muldoon says. "When we're making a deal, there are different ways to structure it from a tax perspective, for example, so I appreciate the challenge of sitting around that table and talking through issues. The structure of the deal isn't defined for me; I'm participating in how to define it."

In part, Muldoon owes her seat at the table to one word: yes. "I've allowed legal to participate in a way where I would be seen as supportive," she explains. "It's very easy to always say no when you're the lawyer at the table. But if you do that, no one will want you at the table to begin with. There are risks, and you need to define them, but you also need to understand that the most successful companies aren't always the most risk-averse. Some risks are legitimate risks."

One risk Muldoon will never take is one that compromises her integrity. Take contracts, for example. "I have the authority to sign contracts for BDP, but I don't sign them because, in my opinion, I can't represent BDP and be a signatory on an agreement inside BDP," Muldoon says. "BDP is my client, and I always want to maintain an arm's-length client relationship."

Muldoon's focus on integrity extends not only to herself, but also to BDP, as demonstrated by her latest venture: Her inner child is finally satisfying its craving for international outreach thanks to the United Nations Global Compact, a policy initiative for businesses that pledge to align their operations with a set of universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labor, environment and anti-corruption.

"It's outside the confines of the legal department, but because it supports ethical and sustainable business, our business leaders are on board with it and have allowed me to own it," Muldoon says. "I plan to sit with our clients and ask what their business initiatives are around the UN principles. Whatever those initiatives are, I think BDP as a logistics provider can support them. This next step will allow me to fulfill that outreach passion I've always had."

Matt Alderton is a freelance writer based in Chicago, Ill.

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