

Interview with Clare Miller

What inspired you to pursue a career in law, and what attracted you to specialise in your practice area?

For as long as I can remember, I wanted to be a lawyer. As a child, my picture of what that meant was simple – one day I would be appointed to the High Court (modest ambitions, clearly). I realised pretty quickly during my articles year that, while my advocacy and mooting skills had been well practised at university, the reality of being a litigator did not suit my personality at all. I was instead drawn to corporate transactional work, and M&A in particular. It is an area of law where completing the transaction – through negotiation and finding mutually beneficial outcomes for the parties – is the outcome itself. For me, it is about building rather than disputing, and helping clients buy, sell, grow and invest, often at pivotal moments for their business or family. I love the rigour and intensity of a transaction, having a licence to strategise and find creative ways to contract, exercising commercial judgement, and the fact that every deal brings together a team with one shared goal of getting the deal done.

Over time, while my practice has centred on private company M&A, I have also carved out a niche area of expertise involving the intersection of corporate and real estate work. This primarily focuses on corporate transactions involving real estate assets, such as unit or share sales and acquisitions, investments in entities holding real estate, and joint venture arrangements. I find this area both fascinating and very tangible – I can literally see cities and skylines change because of the work we do at Gadens. I love walking past a building where I negotiated the joint venture and contracts from the ground up, or one I helped a client buy or sell. I may or may not point at them and tell whoever I'm with. That visible legacy is very real and gives me a sense of accomplishment.

What have been some of the defining moments or highlights of your career so far?

Some of my biggest highlights have been transactions where I could see the impact on the client directly – where completing a sale marks the beginning of a new chapter, or the culmination of a lifetime of work. That might be a founder exiting a business they built from scratch, or selling their life's work on retirement. It might be a significant investment into a client's business from a major player, or the acquisition of a strategically important asset. It could also be a high-profile deal involving an asset with

real public attention, where media strategy is fundamental to achieving the client's goals – and where you learn to read the morning papers with one eye closed.

Beyond client outcomes, some of my quieter defining moments have involved shaping the culture of our team and firm. Seeing lawyers grow through mentorship and excel as the next generation of leaders has been genuinely inspiring – and watching someone I've mentored lead their first deal with confidence is the best motivation to keep going (even if it makes me feel slightly old). Putting our people at the centre of everything we do is a core Gadens pillar, and seeing that play out in the growth of our junior lawyers is incredibly affirming.

Has your experience as a woman in the legal profession shaped your approach to leadership, collaboration or client service?

Yes, definitely. Over my career I have often been one of the few women in the room on a deal (although that has changed significantly over the years). At times this has been helpful, and at other times it has been a hindrance to having a positive experience as a junior lawyer.

These experiences have made me very aware of how much the leadership in a room dictates how women in that room are received. Positive examples include strong leaders – male or female – attributing ideas to the team, or crediting me by name for solutions or work. These are the leaders who say “we” rather than “I” when communicating outcomes to clients.

I have benefitted enormously from some great mentors and clients over my career who have called out stereotypical behaviour or made a point of including me and my contribution in the meeting. I've tried to emulate this in my practice, to make sure everyone's voice is heard.

I've also been open with my team and clients about flexibility and life outside work, which I think gives others permission to do the same. All of my clients know I'm a single mum with commitments outside the office, and I've never met a client who wasn't ready, willing and able to accommodate that. Sharing this has strengthened my client relationships. Clients want a trusted adviser who is available at short notice and in the trenches with them when times are tough – but I've also found them overwhelmingly understanding when I've had to reschedule a meeting or dial in from the school pick-up

line. More than one negotiation has been conducted with a small voice loudly requesting snacks in the background, passing me notes, or waving enthusiastically to the other side on a video call. I have come to regard the mute button as the single greatest legal technology advance of my career (until it isn't and everyone is saying "You're on mute").

I firmly believe transparency builds relationships, and that sharing pressure and stress in both directions makes for better client service. It also goes a long way towards successful collaboration between clients and our internal teams.

What changes to the industry have you witnessed over the span of your career that have positively improved the space for female lawyers?

The biggest change has been how normal flexible and hybrid working has become, particularly since 2020. Lawyers can now build serious careers without choosing between their practice and their caring responsibilities – a change that has made a huge difference to my own career.

Of course, flexibility comes with its own comedy. Over the years my home office has been gate-crashed mid-call by a child in a unicorn costume, I have signed off on a share sale agreement with a sleeping toddler on one arm, and I once had to explain to a boardroom of directors why little arms were showing off broken arm casts to the camera for inspection. On another occasion I joined a completion call convinced I was perfectly presentable, only to discover a sticker on my head. Nobody mentioned it. Everyone had clearly seen it.

What I have really noticed, though, is how much the reaction to all of this has changed. A decade ago I would have apologised profusely and pretended it never happened. Now clients ask after the children by name.

I've also seen Gadens set targets and report transparently on gender representation, strengthen its parental leave policies, and invest in formal sponsorship and leadership programmes. There's also much more willingness to talk openly about unconscious bias and about workplace conduct – not walking past an issue that may have been walked past historically.

Statistics show there are currently more female lawyers than male lawyers, yet more male lawyers hold senior roles. What further progress would you like to see across

the industry to support women in building and sustaining successful careers?

The pipeline isn't the problem anymore. Retention and progression are. I'd like to see more active sponsorship, meaning senior leaders who put women forward for key client relationships, major matters and partnership, not just mentors who give advice.

Partnership models need to recognise that a career may not follow a straight line, so that time working flexibly or on parental leave doesn't permanently slow someone's progress. I'd also like firms to look closely at how work and origination credit are shared, because those decisions quietly shape who gets promoted.

Finally, normalising shared caregiving for men is critical, because flexibility only works when it isn't seen as a 'women's issue'. I've loved seeing men in my team take extended parental leave – they come back with a whole new understanding of what full-time caring looks like, and a new-found respect for anyone who has ever negotiated with a toddler.

Who are the female mentors who supported you throughout your career?

I've been lucky to have several female mentors throughout my career (and some great male ones too!). One worth calling out is Brihony Boan, who probably doesn't even know how valuable her mentorship has been to me.

Brihony is a Partner in our Real Estate team and has served as National Head of Real Estate and as a member of the National Gadens Board – as well as being an all-round fantastic lawyer, mentor, supporter and friend, all while raising a young daughter and carrying significant caring duties of her own.

Given our overlapping corporate and real estate practices, we regularly work on transactions together, and I have found her consistently responsive, proactive and supportive of clients, the Gadens team and me. She is a great sounding board for ideas, client strategies, new initiatives and better ways of doing things. She's also loud about supporting women and calls out stereotypes without missing a beat. For a junior lawyer, having someone confident in the room say "that's not OK" or "why don't we do this differently?" can have a massive impact on everyone present – junior and senior alike.

While I won't name names (they know who they are), some of my most valuable supporters have been clients and peers – women in senior in-house and business roles who were generous with their time and perspective, provided references for me, and continue to astound me with their intelligence and business judgement.

What support or advice did they provide that made an impact?

The female mentors who have had the biggest impact on me are those who haven't made themselves small to fit the world around them, but have called out behaviour and been unapologetically present and visible in rooms. That hasn't necessarily meant being the loudest in the room, but having a presence that is confident and impactful through the weight of their words and actions.

My mentors have also encouraged me to build relationships early, both with clients and across the firm, and to treat business development as part of the job rather than something for later. And they helped me understand that nobody has it all figured out – everyone is paddling furiously under the water to stay afloat!

What would you say to young female lawyers asking for career advice?

Back yourself and ask for what you want – whether that's a role on a particular matter, feedback or a promotion – and don't be too disheartened if the timing doesn't work out as planned. Build your technical foundations properly, because competence breeds confidence.

Invest in relationships with clients and colleagues, as they'll become your network and your future referral sources. Find people who will speak up for you in rooms you aren't in.

Also, be kind to yourself and give yourself a break – burnout is real and can creep up quickly if you don't look after yourself. Lean in to your team and lean on those around you to ask for help.

Looking ahead, what continues to motivate and inspire you in your work?

I'm still motivated by my clients and by the satisfaction of solving a difficult problem and getting a deal over the line. Forming lifelong relationships with clients has been a real highlight of my career. Every transaction is different, so

I'm always learning about my clients' businesses and lives, which makes for a more fulfilling career – and far better dinner conversation.

I'm also very motivated by developing my team and seeing junior lawyers grow into confident, commercially minded advisers.

What trends or challenges are currently shaping your area of practice, and how are you helping clients respond?

A few trends stand out at the moment:

Deal environment: Interest rates, valuation gaps and economic uncertainty have made buyers more cautious. We're seeing more use of earn-outs and W&I insurance to bridge the gap between buyers and sellers.

Regulatory change: Australia's mandatory merger notification regime with the ACCC has changed how we plan deal timetables. FIRB considerations also remain central.

Technology and AI: These are changing how due diligence and contract reviews are done.

I help clients respond by getting involved early, knowing their businesses well, identifying timing risks from the outset, and giving practical, commercial advice rather than just a list of legal issues.



Clare Miller
Partner

Finalist in the Partner of the Year – BigLaw category in the 2026 Women in Law Awards.