

RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE



■ **HILARY DENGEL**
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Hilary Dengel is a distinguished finance partner with extensive experience in private equity and corporate finance. A partner in Davis Polk's Finance practice, she represents financial sponsors, corporate borrowers, and lenders across diverse transactions, including leveraged and investment-grade acquisition financings, asset-based financings, high-yield bond issuances, complex restructurings, and debtor-in-possession and exit financings. Hilary is recognized as a thought leader, contributing to prominent industry publications including *S&P Global*, *International Financial Law Review*, *Dow Jones*, and *American Bankruptcy Institute*. Hilary serves on the firm's Opinion and Recruiting Committees, shaping recruiting strategy, and is one of the firm's two Alumni Partners, overseeing alumni outreach and Davis Polk Revisited, a program supporting lawyers returning to full-time legal careers. Beyond her practice, she actively mentors younger lawyers and parents navigating work-life balance. She engages in various activities and discussions with the firm's women's affinity group, DPWomen, to share insights on her experience and career advancement in the legal profession.

Originally from Canada, Hilary and her husband (another finance lawyer) reside in New York City with their son.

What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

Get to know your peers in the industry. It's often those relationships developed "in the trenches" that are the most meaningful as you become a more senior practitioner. In most situations our respective clients are aligned, and having a good working relationship leads to a smoother process that makes everyone look better. Find small ways to stay in touch with people you enjoy working with – whether it be forwarding interesting articles or a quick email if you see someone closed an interesting transaction – the small things add up over time, and you never know who may be a client down the road.

And don't forget to take care of yourself! Sometimes easier said than done, but whether it's clearing my head on a run or on the golf course, I emerge better able to take on challenges for my clients.

What is the best advice you ever received?

Both of my parents worked in customer/member-facing roles in the golf industry for decades. Observing the way they embodied a customer-first philosophy taught me a lot about how to manage my own practice. Clients want to know that someone is looking out for them. Taking the time to get to know your clients and their businesses will help you spot issues and anticipate the questions they aren't asking yet, and at the same time will help you be commercially minded in your approach. It was perhaps advice by observation, but it has served me well.

Studies have shown women are more reluctant to tout their accomplishments in the workplace. What advice would you give to help women be more comfortable with speaking up?

Keep track of what you've done. Most of us have more notable accomplishments and recent "wins" than those that come to mind on

the spot. You will be able to speak about these accomplishments with greater ease and confidence, and make more of an impact, if you know what you want to focus on.

What role has mentorship/sponsorship played in your career?

I've been fortunate to find wonderful mentors and sponsors throughout my career, and both were (and remain) critical to my career success. Early in my career, my mentors were a range of partners, counsel and associates that appreciated my desire to work hard and learn the practice. Some of these mentors became sponsors who pushed for me to lead interesting and challenging transactions for key clients as I became more senior, and were critical to my building a portfolio of work. It's worth noting that some of my biggest mentors and sponsors have styles, personalities and backgrounds very different from my own. I often tell younger lawyers that your best teachers and backers might come from unexpected sources in your career, so keep an open mind and be willing to engage with those who are willing to invest in you.

What do you enjoy most about your role?

The relationships I've developed over the years, whether with my colleagues, my clients or other professionals, are what bring the most joy to my practice.

On the technical side, I enjoy getting to know my clients' businesses and the plans for any investment. When you really understand what a given business needs and the industry that it is operating in, you can use practical examples to bridge the gap in negotiations. It's incredibly satisfying to know that we planned for a certain transaction when crafting a covenant package and then were able to execute on the strategy seamlessly under the documents.