

Being a high-ranking woman in a legal position: myth or reality?

It could be said that there is equality in the lawyer population in Luxembourg, as it is composed of 46% women. However, fewer women are partners than their male counterparts and they are often not equally represented in senior management roles. This reality can also be seen at the law firm NautaDutilh. Although 50% of new employees are women, this figure decreases progressively with seniority. NautaDutilh Luxembourg has 62 employees, 36 of whom are lawyers, and is led by a woman, Maître Josée Weydert, who is also responsible for the banking and finance department. She has 20 years' experience and is specialised in financial law and capital markets. She has two children and an extremely demanding profession and is happy to share her experience and advice with us:



Photo: Anouk Antony

need to build their career plan a few years earlier than men, if they want to start a family one day and have a senior position. Women must create solid grounds, be determined and not hesitate to make their ambitions clear, so that their career can outlive maternity leave. They often cut this leave short, due to professional integrity and/or a desire to retain their client base and position. When women go back to work after their maternity leave, they must prove that they can juggle work and family life. A high level of organisation, a short commute and the presence of a flexible spouse make this easier.

Is a work/life balance possible for women in this profession and more particularly in business law? What measures have been put in place at NautaDutilh Luxembourg?

Business law is considered a difficult field and competition is felt every day. Junior lawyers just starting their career know that only the best and the most determined will one day become partners. So this race to become a partner requires considerable personal investment. But this should not be everyone's objective. It is completely possible to have a career in which you specialise in one area of law, develop your clientèle and love your job, but do not necessarily aim for a management position. At NautaDutilh, we want our lawyers to have a good quality of life. I usually tell my colleagues to "Work hard and recover to remain at the top". This is essential for personal balance. NautaDutilh has introduced measures to support women in their careers, as well as men brave enough to ask for assistance - to avoid them having to make a choice. So we allow people to work part-time when possible and for several years now we have been using a remote access system to facilitate home-working. Having said that, I think that most parents, both men and women, want to look after their children and see them grow up. As soon as this reality becomes widespread, we will no longer need to talk about the specific situation of women.

We need to make this kind of approach more popular and remember that children need their parents during childhood but also at the start of their adult life. This aspect is often ignored, as we tend to focus on structures for mothers who have just given birth and the problem of finding childcare places. At NautaDutilh, employees organise themselves and the most important aspect is that their work gets done. We have created a children's area and parents receive priority parking spaces. Lawyers can receive assistance from a coach to help them decide what best to do. Our aim is stable, respectful and long-term collaboration.

Finally, what advice would you give to law students, and more specifically to women, who want to start a legal career?

There are large numbers of law students and positions in law firms are given to the best of them. The first piece of advice I would give a student, male or female, is to complete their university studies, then preferably do an LL.M. abroad and get a good command of other languages, including French, English and German. Students must also ensure they choose internships that match their area of specialisation. Once they start work, young lawyers must adapt quickly and provide exceptional services. At NautaDutilh, we do not have a quota for recruitments, as we look at individual talent and potential above anything else. All our employees help to enhance the working environment, regardless of their gender, nationality, religion, sexual orientation or family situation. Skills and merit have no gender. We need to work to make this happen.

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