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## Regional News

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### Meyer Unkovic COO Adapts To New Role With Firm

The Legal Intelligencer  
By Daniel Casciato  
July 5, 2007

The old model of having an office manager run a law firm's daily operations does not work in today's competitive legal environment, according to the managing partner of one of Pittsburgh's biggest firms.

"Gone are the days where you had an office manager who minded the secretaries and made sure the doors are locked at the end of the day," said Kevin McKeegan of Meyer Unkovic & Scott.

Because it has become increasingly difficult to practice law and manage a firm's daily operations, McKeegan believes that it's necessary for a firm to add a chief operating officer if it wants to continue to be successful.

"Today, practicing law and trying to run a firm as a business is so time-consuming - even for midsized firms like us - that adding a chief operating officer is a step most firms should consider taking," he said. "You need to hire someone who can handle the day-to-day and strategic operations on a full-time basis."

After their office manager of 37 years retired recently, Meyer Unkovic looked at it as an opportunity to do some restructuring within the administrative side of the office.

In May, they promoted Lori Alderman to chief operating officer of the firm. Alderman, who is currently on maternity leave, is the only woman chief operating officer among the city's 25 largest law firms.

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"I was excited about the opportunity and really pleased that the firm thought enough of me to consider me for the position," said Alderman, who has been with the firm for nine years. "It also made me feel good about my firm that they had no hesitation that I was a woman, and a pregnant woman at that. I was honored they respected my ability above all else."

Within a couple days of the announcement of her hiring, Alderman gave birth to her second child.

"He came three weeks early," she said with a laugh.

Alderman has a B.A. from West Virginia University and her M.A. from the University of Pittsburgh. According to McKeegan, it was an easy decision for the firm to promote Alderman.

"She's very smart and she's had significant similar responsibilities outside the legal arena," he explained. "Since she's been with us for about nine years, she knows the peculiarities of a midsized firm and our firm in particular. She also has a good handle on the legal marketplace in Pittsburgh."

Alderman, who does not possess a law degree, sees hiring a nonlawyer chief operating officer as a trend among midsized firms.

"It makes your internal structure a little more like a business by putting the operations under one place and under one person," she said. "The bigger firms in the country have clearly gone that way. A lot of them have COOs. For midsized firms, you're seeing them attempt to align more to be like businesses. They are seeing the value of nonlawyer management."

In her role, Alderman is responsible for initiating and executing all firmwide marketing initiatives. She has 40 administrative staff members report to her.

She describes herself as the type of manager who manages from a close distance.

"My personal style is to let people succeed and to let the people who work for me to come up with ideas and try the ideas," she said. "I'm there for guidance."

Her primary responsibilities include overall practice development and marketing, firmwide strategic initiatives, facilities management and personnel management.

The move to hire a chief operating officer did not come as a complete surprise to Alderman.

"We've been doing a lot of different things at the firm and trying new things, so a progressive move didn't surprise me," she said. "But I had no idea they were going to do this."

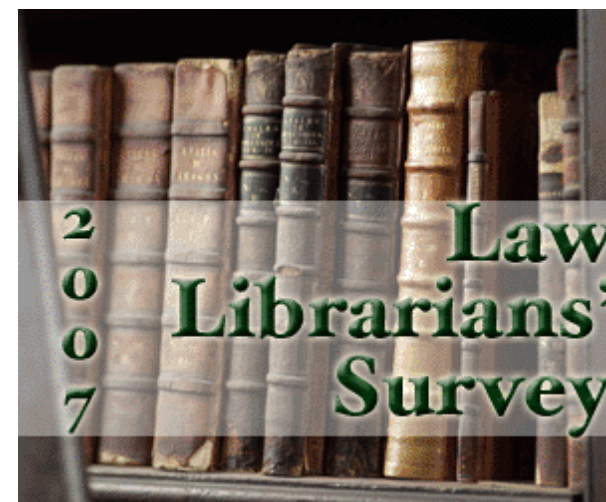
McKeegan said the firm had been thinking about adding a chief operating officer for a while now.

"We completed a strategic plan about two years ago and that forced us to start thinking more long term and strategically," he said. "As we tried to implement some of the elements of the plan and tried to react to how things were changing, it became apparent that you need a COO who is thinking about those things on a full-time basis and helping to do those things on a full-time basis."

He added, "If you are going to be successful, you need to be proactive in terms of seeking out opportunities and be proactive in terms of examining your own structures, practice areas and it helps to have someone who is unbiased and who has a business background to help with those things."

Alderman said she is looking forward to returning from maternity leave next month to officially start in her new position.

"Meyer Unkovic & Scott is a great firm and we've seen a lot of growth in the last 10 years," she said. "I'm really proud to be part of an organization that is moving forward."



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