

ALM.

## LEADERS of the PLAINTIFFS BAR

### ‘Find Your Own Style’: Hannah Ross on Lessons Learned From Two Decades in Plaintiffs Law

BY CHRISTINE SCHIFFNER

*The National Law Journal has launched a profile series of plaintiffs bar leaders. Each Q&A will take a personal look at the attorney’s career and legacy as well as discuss industry trends.*

*In this installment, Bernstein, Litowitz, Berger & Grossmann partner Hannah Ross discusses the importance of defining your own style and voice in litigation and how to inspire young attorneys.*

#### Why did you become a lawyer?

The reason I became a lawyer has a lot to do with my family. I am one of six kids. From a very young age, you know, my parents really stressed and instilled in all of us the importance of helping others and giving back. When I was younger, it obviously was a lot more helping my younger siblings. I’m the second oldest, but as I grew older, it was a much stronger focus on giving back to the community and doing what we could for others.

It was that upbringing coupled with a lot of internships and volunteer programs I did before, during and after college—including working at a rape crisis and domestic violence center—where I really decided what I wanted to do with my life is give victims a voice.

It was about helping to bring justice for them, and to do what I could to right the wrongs. When I went to law school, I really knew that I wanted to spend my time representing victims and help them move forward.

I had started out as a criminal prosecutor in Massachusetts. I spent a couple years at the district attorney’s office in Middlesex County, and then at the attorney general’s office. When I moved to do plaintiff securities work, I really felt like it was the civil analog to being a criminal prosecutor.



Courtesy photo

**Hannah Ross, partner with Bernstein, Litowitz, Berger & Grossmann.**

**Can you talk about one or two cases that shaped your career?** During my 20 years here at Bernstein, I have been very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work on the most significant and the most impactful securities fraud cases. I’ve really been given incredible opportunities to help victims to recover the money that they lost due to fraud.

Over the course of my career, two cases that really stand out are the ones against Allianz and the Bank of America case. In *Allianz*, we represented clients who lost money in a family of funds called the structured Alpha funds, when Allianz deviated from their investment strategy and the clients that we represented incurred significant material losses.

And this all occurred during the pandemic, right at the very beginning of the pandemic, when everyone was just shifting to working from home.

We mobilized immediately and we did an extensive investigation in a very complicated case. We were able

to work incredibly well to recover significant sums of money on behalf of our clients.

We also developed a strategy, where we were able to have clients who—for a wide variety of reasons—did not want to be out in public and file a lawsuit, but we were able to have them participate and we were able to recover for them.

In total, on behalf of our clients, both those who actively litigated and those who did not, we recovered nearly \$2 billion. It was a very important case and recovered material sums of money back for our clients.

The other case that I think of as a milestone in my career is the case against Bank of America, which was a massive recovery of over \$2.4 billion. It was one of the largest recoveries during the financial crisis. The case was litigated all the way to the eve of trial. It was a very intensely, vigorously litigated case where we were able to achieve a tremendous recovery for the class. I'm very proud of the work I did as one of the senior leaders in both cases.

On a personal note, with respect to Bank of America, I worked on this case right after I came back from maternity leave with my first daughter. It's a special case to me because it proved to me that I could litigate at the highest level and handle complex litigations, while at the same time, managing being a new mom. The Bank of America case will always have a special place in my heart.

**You are a woman trailblazer in the legal profession—how do you inspire other young female lawyers who would like to follow in your footsteps?**

That is something I care deeply about and I am always working to make sure that the women lawyers at the firm have all the opportunities available to them to grow and succeed. I am always available as a resource. I hope that when I share my experience that I've learned after 20 years of being at the firm and almost 25 years of being a lawyer; I'm able to share what I learned along the way and that they can learn from my mistakes and my stumbles and grow from that. But I am very focused on making sure that the women lawyers at the firm have a resource, are supported and have the opportunities that they need to succeed as lawyers.

In addition, I'm currently serving in my first year on the executive committee at the firm. And so as

a woman on the executive committee, I'm also very focused on making sure that I share and bring my viewpoints, my experiences, my insights as a woman to the firm and to the firm's work and the firm's employees.

**What challenges have you faced on your way up to having a leadership role in the firm?**

The challenges that I faced are challenges that are often unique to young lawyers alike. Especially when I was a young lawyer, criminal prosecutor starting out, I was often told, there's just one way to do something. I was often told that I should adopt a certain persona to be visibly very tough and to yell a lot.

But that was not me, and that's not how I have become an effective advocate. A lot of my challenges early on were just making sure that I found my own space where I could be tough, I could be confident in my own voice. As a woman, I certainly internalized that I needed to be stronger and more vocal to be successful.

As I look back on it now, I think that that was certainly a challenge and a hurdle I faced as a young woman, but I think that's something that a lot of young lawyers, both men and women alike face and have to get comfortable with.

**What is your advice to young lawyers?**

My advice to young lawyers is to find your own voice and find your way of presenting the best case for your client. And everyone's going to have their own style, but you need to have confidence in your style and your talents and your abilities, because once you have your confidence, you will be an effective advocate. There isn't a one-size-fits-all to this.

I think as young lawyers, when you're watching more experienced lawyers, especially ones that you think are incredible lawyers, that's what you use as your model. And it's not going to work for you if that's not your personality. It's really finding what works for you. You can take a little bit from everybody, but you're going to have to make it your own.

And the other one is you need to know every detail. Every person in the room is going to often rely on the youngest lawyer to know all the details. That's how you're going to shine. That's how you're going to be considered reliable. That's how you will excel.