

PUBLICATION

Sitting Down with "Work-Life Warrior" Jennifer Curry

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In 2020, Baltimore shareholder and Labor & Employment vice-chair Jennifer Curry was awarded Baker Donelson's "Work-Life Warrior Award."

The Work-Life Warrior Award was established to honor an attorney in the Firm who demonstrates an ongoing commitment to excellence in maintaining a healthy work-life balance or has advocated on behalf of work-life balance issues for the benefit of others.

We sit down with Jennifer as she reflects over this year, lessons learned and how she and her family took their weekends back.

What does "Work-Life Balance" mean to you?

For me, it means making sure that I am home most nights for dinner and bedtime and that I find ways to carve out quality time with my family. When I am home, I try my hardest to be present – avoiding my phone or email if I can help it. "Balance" also means that I take seriously the job of protecting that time with my family as much as possible. It becomes too easy to schedule a meeting or to take a phone call during family time, making it even harder to keep the line between work and family. There are times when a meeting, phone call, or email during family time is unavoidable, however, I try hard to make those instances the exception and not the rule.

Your practice focuses on labor and employment, a critical area of law during the pandemic. What were those first few weeks like for you after the pandemic hit and your clients were forced into remote working environments, strict protocols or even forced to reduce their workforce?

The beginning of the pandemic was very different for me than it was for most other people. Just over a week before the pandemic hit us and we all went remote, I was already at home recovering from brain surgery. This experience gave me such a unique perspective on life from the dread many felt about being stuck in the house. My appreciation for life and the fact that I was able to have my surgery before the pandemic – without all the restrictions – was significant. Because of that, I had a special opportunity to take a different approach with my clients, most of whom were panicking about what they were going to do with their business and their employees. In between bed rest and regular naps, I was talking to my clients about how to handle their employees with respect and care.

How do you mentally "reset" each day? (i.e. a walk, reading a book, eating dinner with your family, etc.)

Exercising and walking my dog each morning and eating dinner with my family each night are the ways that I stay grounded and balanced.

With all the challenging times that came with the pandemic, what were also some moments you enjoyed?

My family really took back our weekends – we had become so wrapped up in going, going, going every weekend, that we forgot how to just be a family. The pandemic forced us to slow down and focus on being

present with each other. The fact that I have learned to appreciate that time together more, instead of focusing so much on whether we're doing enough activities each weekend, has been life changing.

If you could go back to last year and give yourself a "pep talk" before the pandemic hit, what would you say?

Enjoy life and don't take anything for granted. Also, be ready for anything and stay present. This pandemic has taught all of us that this life is too short to waste it on unnecessary and unimportant worries. Life is a gift and you should treat it like one.

In your role as a mentor and leader in the Firm, what advice do you often give to women who are just starting their legal career?

While I regularly emphasize to new attorneys that their focus should be on learning how to be a good lawyer, doing good work, and treating shareholders as their most important clients, for women, I also recommend that they should start envisioning where they want to see their career in 5, 10, and 20 years. Having clear goals and expectations for our careers may seem ostentatious for some women, but to be successful we must be able to envision ourselves holding certain titles and roles in order to succeed. Those goals may evolve over the years but knowing what we want for ourselves is important.

Who is a woman you admire?

I admire all the women that most women attorneys admire – Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Sonya Sotomayor, Michelle Obama, Kamala Harris, etc. However, there are two women at Baker Donelson that are closer to home that I admire and seek to pattern myself after – Jenna Bedsole and [Christy Crider](#). These women are two of the hardest workers that I know, and they somehow do it while zealously advocating for other women and protecting their own work-life balance. I have been the recipient of their support and faith in ways that I cannot thank them enough for, and I know that I'm not even close to being the only woman at Baker Donelson who can say that. Jenna and Christy truly are my women heroes.