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Baker Donelson Alumni Spotlight: Natalie Bolling

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Natalie Bolling serves as senior employment counsel with Vulcan Materials Company in Birmingham, Alabama.

Tell us about your career at Baker Donelson. What did you learn from your time here that stuck with you?

I spent ten years at Baker and have several takeaways from my time there. However, if I had to hone in on one or two things that stuck with me, I would say: 1) Having the right mentor (especially early in your career) is key to how you develop as a successful attorney. There is really no substitute for that. 2) Your career was not meant to be a race. Don't allow yourself to get bogged down billing hours and think you are superwoman for banging out 200 more hours than the next person. It is never too soon to start building meaningful relationships and strong networks. These connections speak louder than numbers sometimes.



Tell us about your role now.

As in-house senior employment counsel with Vulcan Materials Company, I advise internal clients on all areas involving federal and state employment laws. In collaboration with divisional/regional HR teams, I oversee employee issues for Vulcan's entire organization consisting of thousands of employees, union and non-union. I travel throughout the country as needed to oversee litigation matters and/or conduct investigations involving employees. I communicate substantially and regularly with senior leadership regarding business risks and employment matters. Compared to working at a law firm, I see my current role as much more proactive than reactive. As such, I counsel my clients to avoid litigation where possible.

Why is it important to mentor young women attorneys?

As you can see from my previous response, mentoring is key to a successful career. I think it's especially important to provide mentoring for young women attorneys because they, along with other minorities, have so often been overlooked for these growth opportunities in a field that has traditionally been male dominated. Moreover, fair or not, women often have more domestic or family responsibilities on their plate than their male counterparts. It's crucial to have that mentor who shows you how to balance all of those responsibilities without sacrificing your desired legal career."

What is one piece of advice you have on work-life balance?

I think the world changed for all of us in the midst of the COVID pandemic. We have changed the way we work, the way we interact, what and who we make our priorities, and on and on. I think attorneys are expected to always work hard, and if you don't, you're not a good attorney. While that holds some truth, my advice is to keep everything in perspective. Yes, you need to be a hard worker if you want to be successful but realize that working yourself to death gets you nowhere fast, either. Learn to constantly review your priorities to ensure you are paying proper attention to things that "count" in your personal life so you can show up as your best self to handle your professional business.

What advice would you give to your younger self just starting the practice of law?

I would tell my younger self that the practice of law will, many times, be unavoidably stressful. It will be important to develop good, healthy coping habits to stay ahead of the impacts of stress. It's okay to acknowledge when you are not okay, and it's important to stop and breathe.

Is there a misconception you had about going in-house that has now been debunked and if so, what is it?

I had always heard that working in-house is really the same as working at a law firm but with less hours. Incorrect. The work is not the same because you are responsible for a completely different audience. As a "law firm" lawyer, we often have the luxury of quoting case law, marveling over legal theories or qualifying a legal opinion with "may," "likely", or "this can go either way." Directly supporting an organization where business decisions are made every hour of every day, you must take a stand and advise the business on the next steps to accomplish the business goal. It is a fast-paced environment where you weigh risks and give legal opinions without the "10-page legal memo."