

# PUBLICATION

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## Baker's Dozen: What Does Leaving a Legacy Mean to You?

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**What does it mean to leave a legacy? For some, it's about mentorship and creating opportunities for those who follow. For others, it's about building relationships, shaping a culture of inclusion, or making a lasting impact on an industry. We asked leaders across Baker Donelson and beyond to share their thoughts on what leaving a legacy means to them. Their reflections highlight the power of leadership, resilience, and the importance of lifting others up along the way.**

1. In my 20+ years in the shipyard industry, I hope that I have been able to pave a path where women in this industry are seen as equals and valued for their expertise and contributions. I want future generations to feel empowered to be unapologetically themselves and confident that their worth will be recognized through their achievements. This legacy is about fostering an environment where equality is the standard, not the exception.



- *Kimberly Theriot-Smith, Conrad Industries*

Leaving a legacy is not something I think about consciously, but I think the best parts of life involve meaningful connections. I'd like to think that my clients, colleagues, and family know how dedicated I am to authentically connecting with and understanding them, and that my interactions might inspire others to create similar connections. Embracing the awkward is something I am very good at, and I believe it can lead to enhanced trust, empathy, and appreciation for each other.



- *Melodie Hengerer, Shareholder, Baker Donelson*

3. I have been a member of the Baker Donelson Senior Management Team since 1995, including 30 years in management, and 20 years on the Baker Board. Here are a few reflections on what I have learned on this journey:



- Clients First. Attorneys as professionals have a unique legal and moral standing. We exist to serve others – our clients. The disciplined view of everything through a client's lens is the core of our professional and personal responsibilities. In Health Law/Public Policy, we have been honored to serve many of our clients for multiple decades. It is because we never lost sight of who they are, and our purpose.
- One Firm. The Baker Donelson Health Law Practice has been privileged to be ranked top ten Nationally for 20 consecutive years. It was the first Baker practice to receive a national Chambers ranking. The Baker Health Law team works together seamlessly. Our goal is to give the client the best Baker has, without regard to anyone's individual performance metrics.
- Shared Values. Law firms are people organizations. People are its principal assets. The glue to those assets is shared values. We are each committed to excellence. We are each committed to

collaboration. Every client's problem is a shared problem – "What can I do to assist!" By hiring carefully and reinforcing shared values, we become a truly great team that can accomplish great things for every client.

- *Dick Cowart, Shareholder, Baker Donelson*

4. To me, leaving a legacy means honoring the sacrifices of those before me while paving the way for future generations. It is about building a foundation of excellence, determination, and empowerment that inspires and benefits other generations to come.



- *Jerrick Murrell, Associate, Baker Donelson*

5. The phrase "Leaving a Legacy" to me means living my life – professionally, socially, and personally – in such a way that it makes a positive impact on those who follow me and survive me. It means working effectively today to create lasting changes for those like me and those not like me as well. "Leaving a Legacy" is less about being remembered and more about having contributed to my community in a way that provides others opportunities and accessible pathways to achieve goals that they otherwise would not have had or known about, regardless of whether it's a professional or personal pursuit.



- *Chaitra Gowda, Shareholder Baker Donelson*

6. My professional legacy would not be about titles or projects completed, but directly related to the people with whom I interacted. I hope that in every role I shaped an environment where people built meaningful careers because they were supported and encouraged to take on new challenges. In addition, I hope I've created teams in which everyone felt included, and they understood that their career was more than a job, it was a way to have a positive impact. In other words, if I have made a difference in the individual humans with whom I partnered, that will be an awesome legacy.



My personal legacy would have to be related to my children. Specifically, if they are individuals with strong values, know the importance of kindness, are constant learners, are equipped to achieve their dreams, and maybe end up with a few good memories of funny dinner table stories – I'm good.

- *Tara Plimpton, Chief Legal Officer and Corporate Secretary, Regions Financial Corporation*

7. For me, "leaving a legacy" is divorced from any award, honor, or success achieved in my career. Instead, leaving my legacy is only about the impact I can have on the space I will eventually leave. In other words, "legacy" is about how you leave a place for the next group of women behind you. This is why I serve as co-chair of the mentoring committee and for starting Baker Well. Through these efforts, I hope to leave a space for women and other lawyers at Baker Donelson with robust mentoring support and a culture where peak performance is achievable and valued, without having to sacrifice themselves in unalterable ways at the same time.



- *Ty Kelly, Shareholder, Baker Donelson*

8. Leaving a legacy, to me, means being known as a trusted advisor to clients and as a mentor to younger attorneys. It further means being recognized and remembered as someone who was the consummate professional, ethically and morally astute, generous, and humble.



- *Craig Conley, Shareholder, Baker Donelson*

9. To me, leaving a legacy means developing a practice of sufficient size and client connectivity that enables the lawyers working with me to have a clear path forward as successful partners even after I retire. It also means building out Baker Donelson's Charleston office to be a full-service office that reflects the Charleston market and provides the skillsets that allow attorneys from across the Firm to leverage their client base to generate work in the Charleston market.



- *Ashley Cooper, Shareholder, Baker Donelson*

10. As I planned and openly discussed my retirement three years in advance, I devoted myself to transitioning clients, work, and legal community obligations to others. I wanted my legacy to be not that I was missed upon my departure, but that I was not missed because I took the time necessary to lay the groundwork for a seamless transition. To those considering leaping into the abyss of retirement, I highly recommend openly discussing your retirement plans with leadership, clients, and colleagues sooner rather than later, so you are able to set up a legacy for yourself. P.S. Retirement is fabulous!



- *Kim Vance, Baker Donelson Alumnae*

11. Leaving a legacy means making a lasting impact on your community, such that you are remembered for your positive contributions and values. It is about the small things that make a big difference, such as the way you treat others, how you choose to spend your time and resources, and the values you instill in the next generation. Leaving a legacy is less about your own individual achievements and more about how you lift others up to help them achieve their goals.



- *Catherine Atwood, Senior Vice President, General Counsel, and Secretary, Regional Management Corp.*

12. In my view, leaving a legacy means that:

1. My efforts to fully integrate and transition clients have been successful in that the clients have remained with the Firm after my retirement; and
2. The Baker Donelson attorneys remaining in the Firm believe that I have been helpful in providing appropriate mentoring and training in support of their professional development



- *Sandy Teplitzky, Senior Counsel, Baker Donelson*

13. As I welcome my second daughter into the world, the idea of "leaving a legacy" takes on a new perspective to me. Because I hope, in everything I do, whether that be in my professional or personal life, I have an opportunity to help people and show my daughters how to be brave and kind women, always.



- *Danielle Smith, Baker Women Manager, Baker Donelson*