

Inside the Strategy Behind Gibson Dunn's Rapid NYC Expansion

By Dan Roe

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What You Need to Know

- Gibson Dunn's New York office is among the fastest-growing in Big Law.
- The firm recently added another floor and 46,500 square feet to its office in the MetLife Building.
- While not managing toward specific headcount numbers, the firm has succeeded in landing partners who sought "destination practices," chair and managing partner Barbara Becker said.

For one of New York City's fastest-growing Big Law firms, Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher isn't operating with many specific targets or deadlines in mind.

That isn't to say that chair and managing partner Barbara Becker isn't thinking about the benefits of scale in the world's premier legal market. In fact, the firm has grown its New York head count by 40% in the past five years, putting it in the top quartile of five-year growth among the NLJ 500's 50 biggest New York firms by head count.

The growth prompted the firm to enlarge its New York office: The firm recently signed a 15-year lease extension at 200 Park Ave. that adds 46,500 square feet and the expansion into the building's 34th floor. The office now contains 600 lawyers, up from 373 in 2020, according to NLJ500 data.



Gibson Dunn Office in Manhattan, New York.

Photo: Ryland West/ALM

Rather, Becker, who succeeded 19-year chair Ken Doran in May 2021, and New York office managing partners Mylan Denerstein and Andrew Fabens are implementing a two-pronged growth strategy shared by all of the global firm's offices.

First, Gibson Dunn looks for lawyers who can build "destination practices" at the firm.

"The strategy is to build destination practices in everything we do by being very intentional about who we hire and making sure that every person fits in from a culture perspective and from a quality perspective," Becker said. "It has served us really well, and we do it across the board in litigation and white collar and investigations and also in M&A, private equity, real estate, and restructuring."

Becker offered the example of Barry Berke, who arrived in October 2024 from Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel (now HSF Kramer) with four fellow partners to co-chair Gibson's global litigation practice.

"It's our prototypical strategy of finding a destination lawyer who's a lovely person who has a wonderful team, bringing them in, and making sure they're fully integrated into the firm and working across the platform with other partners on their matters. And it has worked beautifully," Becker said.

Not all sought-after lateral partners need to bring a substantial book of business, Becker added. In the cases of former Sullivan & Cromwell M&A partner George Sampas and former Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison private equity partner Brian Scrivani, who both joined the firm in June 2024, it was "not about a particular client or book of business, but really the accumulation of experience and their ability to meet clients to get the work and execute it beautifully," Becker said.

Roughly half of the New York partner growth has also been internal: The firm has promoted 44 associates and counsel to partner in New York, and added 42 lateral partners, during Becker's tenure.

Secondly, the firm has ensured its growth is sustainable and able to weather economic turmoil by maintaining a roughly even split between litigation and corporate practices.

"Our practice is pretty much 50/50 litigation and corporate, and I think that really helps us be collegial and collaborative, because both play such a significant role in our firm and both are so incredibly valued," Denerstein said.

The balance isn't an exact science; Denerstein said her office won't forgo opportunistic hires if they temporarily shift the balance toward litigation or corporate.

Although New York is Gibson Dunn's largest office by far, Fabens noted the opportunity cost of expanding in the city.

"We want to be here because we know we can attract and mint the very best talent, and having a bigger pool makes that easier," he said. "It is an expensive place to operate, though, so we're happy to build other offices in markets where we think we can grow a great deal more."

The firm isn't managing New York growth toward a particular number, though.

"Scale is definitely important and New York is super important to the strategy, but we think about it platform-wide: adding the right people, by elevating people and hiring laterally, who can help us grow the pie," Becker said. "We don't need to be at 700 New York lawyers by next year or two years or anything like that."

Like their colleagues in other locations, Gibson Dunn's 600 New York lawyers are expected to show up at the MetLife Building at least three days a week, a policy Becker said will remain in place. "It's a minimum, not a maximum," she said, adding, "the floors are crowded."

To promote collaboration while lawyers are in the office, Gibson Dunn has dedicated its 56th floor as a "flex floor" for attorneys to connect with one another.

"People love being on 56 because it's crowded and people are up here," Denerstein said. "It's more than just working in the office, we want to make sure people are making the right connections when they're here."