They've Got Next: The 40 Under 40 – Madalyn Miller of Gibson Dunn

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They've Got Next: The 40 Under 40 honoree Madalyn Miller of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher
Photo Illustration: Jonathan Hurtarte/Bloomberg Law; Photo courtesy of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher

Madalyn Miller

Age:	39
Law Firm:	Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher
Practice Area:	Banking & Finance
Title:	Partner
Location:	New York
Law School:	Columbia Law School

Please describe two of your most substantial, recent wins in practice.

It's hard to pick just two, because the matters I'm proudest of really share a theme—being there for clients as they scale.

The first is representing FTAI Aviation on its $2.5 billion warehouse facility into the inaugural asset-backed security for its strategic capital initiative. What made it meaningful wasn't only the size or the structure; it was doing it for a client that has grown so substantially in such a short window and getting to be the team they trust to execute at that scale. Aircraft finance is a complex, asset-intensive world—with clients like FTAI, we have an opportunity to really view ourselves as partners instead of just service providers. Our role on this transaction was comprehensive, from the review of the term sheets initially provided by the warehouse banks to the structuring and execution of FTAI's MRE 2026-1 ABS transaction. Both the warehouse and the ABS had unique features that we were able to help navigate the company and the banks through—in particular ensuring that the secured financing permitted the investors to still tap into the value provided by FTAI's MRE program, which gives airlines access to FTAI's inventory of engine assets.

The second is our work with AIP Capital on its secured lending program, including its engine warehouse. I've had the privilege of working with AIP almost from the very beginning—from helping the two founders set up the company to watching them build a platform with multiple billions of dollars of assets under management. Being trusted to grow alongside a client like that is genuinely the most rewarding part of this job.

More broadly, what I value most is loyalty that runs both ways—like representing the lenders to Castlelake and Altavair on their aviation asset-backed securities transactions, relationships we've held across years and over$6 billion of deal flow. That kind of repeat trust is the truest measure of doing the work well.

What is the most important lesson you learned as a first-year attorney and how does it inform your practice today?

Looking back on my first year as an associate, the biggest lesson I learned was that technical skill alone does not always win the day; it is the combination of preparation, listening, and thoughtful collaboration that truly moves deals forward. I recall as a junior associate that I had missed a signature page (as junior associates are apt to do from time to time), and when I called the midlevel associate on the other side of the transaction to alert them of this, instead of using it as an opportunity to win a point, he took time to help me problem solve and come to a solution that worked for all parties without alarming any clients. While people often think of law as being adversarial, being ethical, understanding, and professional is the best way to work with the various parties involved to get to the best outcome. That midlevel associate is now a partner at a firm that I am across from frequently, and his kindness to me as a panicked junior is never forgotten. Having developed that level of trust is only a benefit to our respective clients when working through tough problems.

How do you define success in your practice?

Success in my practice isn't measured by headlines or hours billed, but by whether my clients achieve their commercial goals with as little stress as possible. I begin every engagement by clarifying the objective, constraints, and trade-offs, and then translate that into a practical plan that the whole team can own. The best deals move smoothly when stakeholders feel heard, tensions are anticipated, and decisions are supported by clear data and candid dialogue. When stress stays low, we unlock creative problem solving because we're not fighting over miscommunications; we're focused on the core objective. Equally important is the team I work with: a group that learns every day and genuinely enjoys coming to work. I invest in mentorship, create safe spaces for questions, and celebrate both small wins and big insights. A culture of curiosity and accountability keeps our junior colleagues growing, while our senior teammates model disciplined collaboration. Ultimately, this blend—client success with minimal friction, and a joyful, growth-oriented team—defines true practice success, and I strive to sustain it in every matter I take on.

The emergence of artificial intelligence is transforming the practice of law. How has AI impacted your strategic approach to your work?

AI is going to make us a lot more efficient, and I love that for clients—anything that takes cost and time out of a deal is a win for them. But honestly, I think it makes the human part of this job more valuable, not less. The things AI can't do—reading a room, knowing which point is actually worth fighting for, being the person a client calls at 11 p.m. when something blows up, holding a relationship together over years and across deals—that's where the real value is, and it's where I put my energy. So my approach has been to lean into the efficiency wherever it helps and to double down on the relationship side, which is the part clients actually remember.

How would more junior lawyers on your team describe your leadership style?

I think they'd say I empower them. The thing I care most about is that this isn't a practice where the partners hold all the client relationships and the juniors just do the work in the background. I involve the whole team in business development—the dinners, the pitches, the client calls—because relationships are the entire game here, and the associates are the ones who will carry those relationships forward. Giving them that exposure early and trusting them with real responsibility and real client contact is how you actually develop people. I push them, but I'm in it with them, and I genuinely want them building their own books and their own careers.

Who is your greatest mentor in the law and what have they taught you?

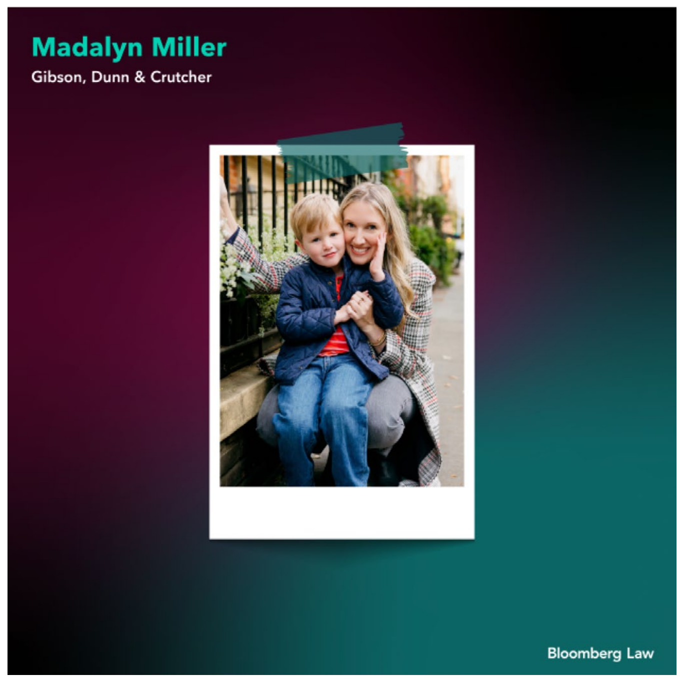
Without a doubt, my mentor is Zarrar Sehgal of Clifford Chance. He saw something in me as a first-year associate and spent a significant amount of time fostering my potential all the way through advocating for me to join the Clifford Chance partnership. The hundreds (and probably thousands) of hours that I spent in his office sculpted me into the attorney that I am today. He taught me that critical thinking begins with questioning: What problem are we really solving, what assumptions are we making, and what would a rigorous test look like? He challenged me to map issues before diving into drafts, to sketch options, compare risks, and reason backwards from client objectives. He modeled disciplined work ethic—planning ahead, meeting tight deadlines, and delivering quality work with calm intensity—yet he never lost sight of the human side of practice. He insisted that we have fun with the work, weaving humor into long sessions, celebrating small breakthroughs, and maintaining curiosity even when transactions were complex. He treated mistakes as learning opportunities rather than failures, turning each assignment into a chance to improve.

What are you most proud of as a lawyer?

As a partner at Gibson and a mentor to my Columbia Law School students, my proudest accomplishment is not a single win, but the team I've built and the talented young lawyers I've helped grow. I measure success by the people who come before me—how they learn to think, draft, and advocate with integrity; how they gain the confidence to tackle complex deals and stand up for clients under pressure. I invest in structured mentorship, provide clear feedback, and create opportunities for hands-on experience so every junior member can stretch beyond their comfort zone. My work with Columbia Law fosters a pipeline of curious,rigorous minds who bring fresh perspectives to practice and client service. The joy is not only in their becoming excellent practitioners but in their eagerness to mentor others in turn. That ripple effect—through the firm and the legal community—defines the true measure of success for me and is what I am most proud of. I hope to continue expanding that impact, inviting colleagues at every level to participate, and to pass along the lessons that have shaped my own career for our clients daily.

Tell us your two favorite songs on your summer music playlist.

"Livin' la Vida Loca" by Ricky Martin—it's my son's latest favorite, and we dance like crazy around the house to it. And "Summer Girl" by HAIM—I love the laid-back summer vibes.



Madalyn Miller of Gibson Dunn and her "mini-me" (aka her son), Carter, in front of their house in New York's Gramercy Park relaxing, snuggling, and exploring the neighborhood.

Photo Illustrations: Jonathan Hurtarte and Braden Brook/ Bloomberg Law; Photo courtesy of Madalyn Miller

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