

TEXAS LAWYER

TEXAS INFLUENTIAL WOMAN OF THE YEAR: HILLARY HOLMES, GIBSON DUNN



Texas Lawyer is recognizing Hillary Holmes of Gibson Dunn as winner of the Texas Influential Woman of the Year award. Read a Q&A with her below.

When you first started in your career, what strategies did you employ to amplify your voice and ensure that the issues important to you were heard by decision makers?

Early on, I learned that the surest way to be heard is to be the person in the room who knows the answer cold. I never wanted my voice to carry because I was the loudest; I wanted it to carry because I had done the work and was right.

So, I went deep on the technical substance of securities and capital markets law until I could speak with real authority, and that preparation became my entry point into rooms where decisions were made. I also made a point of being useful. I volunteered for the hard assignments and the novel questions, and I followed through.

Decision-makers remember the person who solved the problem—and who worked harder than others. That reputation opened doors. Just as important, I learned to say what I thought plainly and respectfully, even when I was a junior person at the table or the only woman. I tried never to bury my point in qualifiers. If I believed a client was taking on risk, I said so directly and explained why. If I saw opportunity the client could leverage by being creative, I pointed it out, even if no one else saw it.

Finally, I built relationships with peers and clients who became a network of trust over decades. Establishing credibility and being genuine ensured I had the platform to use my voice and be heard.

How has your perspective on leadership evolved over time, and what does being a leader mean to you now?

When I was younger, I think I equated leadership with being the expert—having the answers and executing flawlessly on the deal in front of me. That instinct served me well technically, but it was an incomplete picture.

Over time, my view has shifted from being the person who does the work to being the person who builds the people who do the work. The most meaningful parts of my job now are developing younger lawyers, putting them in position to shine, and giving them the same hard assignments and direct feedback that shaped me.

Leadership, to me, now means multiplying capability rather than demonstrating my own. It also means setting a tone. In a high-stakes, fast-moving practice, people take their cues from how the leader behaves under pressure. I try to stay calm, be decisive, communicate clearly, and treat everyone with respect and gratitude.

Culture is built in those small but critical moments. And I have come to believe a real leader takes responsibility and shares credit. When something goes wrong, I want to own it; when something goes right, it was because of the team. Being a leader means I measure success less by my own record and more by the strength of the team and the clients we have served well over the long term.