

Rising Star: Gibson Dunn's Anita Girdhari

Law360, New York (August 3, 2017, 3:55 PM EDT) – Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP's Anita Girdhari is a jack of all trades in the transportation world. She worked on two of the first U.S. public-private partnership transportation deals to use private activity bonds — interstate projects in Texas — and has expanded her expertise ever since, earning a spot as one of five transportation practitioners under 40 honored by Law360 as Rising Stars.

WHAT DREW HER TO TRANSPORTATION WORK:

Girdhari's fluency in the Spanish language drew her to projects that were based in Latin America. Though she didn't live there, she often traveled to the countries where the projects were located.

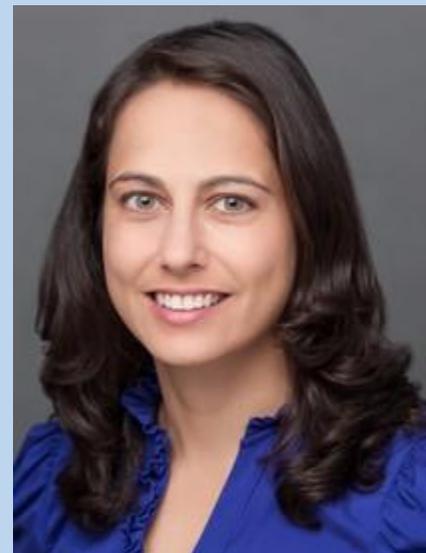
"I had an interest in working in Latin America so I was working on some public-private partnerships — toll road deals in Chile. From there we got involved in the U.S. space, because one of our biggest clients was the equity sponsor on those deals and then they moved to the U.S.," she said.

WHAT KEPT HER IN TRANSPORTATION WORK:

Though transportation started as a sort of default interest — a way to get her work in Latin America — she fell in love with its tangibility, the idea that you are building something physical.

"A lot of the plain finance work I was doing, you're financing a company, or you're giving someone a loan or raising debt in the capital markets, but in this space you can actually drive on the roads that you helped finance to build, so it feels a little bit like you're creating something from the ground up. I like that feeling," she said. "And then one of the things that I really like

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STAR



Anita Girdhari
Gibson Dunn

Age: 37

Home base: New York

Position: Partner

Law school: New York University School of Law

First job after law school: Associate at White & Case LLP

about this specialty is that it touches on so many different areas of law, so it kind of makes you jack of all trades.”

A RECENT CASE THAT WAS EXCITING FOR HER:

Girdhari repeatedly compared her work to a puzzle, so she often spoke of challenges and fun in the same sentence.

“More recently I worked on the Georgia I-285 transaction,” she said. “That was interesting because it was the first time that we structured what the bankers referred to as tax-exempt bank debt. It took a little bit more thought, and it was a very interactive, fun experience.”

WHAT MOTIVATES HER:

In addition to the compelling work, it's the people she works with that keep her going.

“I'm one of those lawyers that went into big law to pay off my student loans," Girdhari said. "And flash forward a crazy number of years I'm still there. What keeps me in the game and what keeps me motivated are, first, I absolutely love the team that I work with. I think that I work with people that I would consider, across the board, to be friends. So that just makes my work environment amazing. It's fun to go to work and hang out with people you think are your friends and do work that you find really interesting and fascinating and satisfying.”

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES OF HER TYPE OF WORK:

One of the biggest challenges for Girdhari is also the thing that makes it most interesting: staying on top of all of the different pieces without feeling discouraged. The other: work-life balance.

"I'm a working mom. I have two young kids at home," she said. "For me, one of the biggest challenges is just constantly reassessing work-life balance and how to make it all work in a way that works for me professionally but also personally at the same time, which, I have to say, Gibson is amazing at. They made me a partner while I was out on maternity leave with my second kid.”

ADVICE ON THAT WORK-LIFE BALANCE FRONT:

Knowing that her nights could become suddenly packed if there's a late development in a deal, Girdhari goes into work a bit later, monitoring from home, to give her more time with her family. But her top advice is to avoid thinking of the work-life balance in a daily or weekly context.

“The best advice I was ever given — which is now what I tell other people, and I think it's spot on to be honest with you — is if you're trying to look on a daily or even weekly basis and say 'OK, did I have the exact number of hours I wanted at home versus the exact number of hours I wanted at the office,' especially in my practice area where I travel a lot, you're going to constantly feel kind of discouraged,” she said. “And it might be a tough fit, but if you're able to look at a monthly or bi-monthly kind of perspective, and say, 'OK, this month, was I present at home enough? Did I get to do — with my family or friends, or just things for myself personally — enough this month or two months? Or did I, at the same time, feel like I was in the office enough, present enough, doing the level of quality work that I

wanted during that time?' And if you can keep the answer to that yes, I think it's a way you can kind of make this type of job continue to work."

— *As told to Dave Simpson*

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2017 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,200 submissions. This interview has been edited and condensed.

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