

Podcast: #WhyMcGlinchey?

Lateral to Leadership with Mag Bickford

April 11, 2024

After joining McGlinchey in 2016, **Mag Bickford** has risen to firm leadership, serving on the executive Policy Committee, leading the Labor and Employment practice group, and managing the firm's largest office in New Orleans. In this episode, she speaks with Director of Talent Acquisition **Margeaux Roush** about the avenues and opportunities for leadership that she has found, priorities for her growing practice and office, as well as the people and culture that make McGlinchey unique.

Margeaux Roush: My name is Margeaux Roush and I'm the director of talent acquisition at McGlinchey Stafford. Today I am joined by Mag Bickford, managing member of our New Orleans office and head of our Labor and Employment practice group. Welcome, Mag. How are you today?

Mag Bickford: Good. I am doing well. It's such a pleasure to visit with you today, Margeaux.

Margeaux Roush: Thanks, Mag. Today, we wanted to talk with Mag about her McGlinchey journey. Mag joined McGlinchey in 2016 and has had significant impact on the firm in her seven years with us. Mag has been a leader in New Orleans and has had a very active role and voice in the growth of the firm. So Mag, why don't we start with you sharing a little bit about your experience joining McGlinchey and why you chose to lateral here?

Mag Bickford: Well, it's actually a little bit different from most people who join McGlinchey, but I was at a previous firm and my associate decided to join McGlinchey. Pretty much every month, she would take me to lunch and tell me all about the magic of McGlinchey. And I was also friends with Steve Beiser, who was a member here at the time and still is. And I knew that he was just such a great guy and they were both such wonderful L&E practitioners.

So finally, one day they caught me on the right day and I said, yeah, I want to talk to McGlinchey. It sounds like a really great place. So within, I think two or three weeks of that conversation, I had an office, I was going to trial and I was learning about all things McGlinchey. It was really a wonderful transition. The nice part was that Susanne, the associate who brought me over, got a lovely little recruiting bonus because she brought over somebody new. So it was a win-win all around the table.

I literally was welcomed with open arms from Kathy Celestine, who sits at the front desk in the office and keeps all things McGlinchey in line, and Gary Alba, who is one of our services people, who actually went over to my old law firm, picked up the boxes, put them in his truck, and brought them over here. It was truly like coming home. And home it is, still.

Margeaux Roush: Excellent. Well, we're thrilled to have you here. When you joined us in 2016, did you envision that you would have this kind of leadership role?

McGlinchey is the perfect size – just the right size. I was warmly received by so many people who empowered me and gave me the tools and resources I needed to get involved, to grow my practice, to become a leader in the firm.

Mag Bickford: Absolutely not. But it's been the best thing ever to happen to me. McGlinchey is the perfect size – just the right size. I was, as I mentioned, warmly received by so many people who empowered me and gave me the tools and resources I needed to get involved, to grow my practice, to become a leader in the firm. And I humbly say this, but I like being part of the growth and the development of the firm. And I think I have something to offer in that respect. So it was a really good marriage of my skill sets and how I can serve McGlinchey.

Margeaux Roush: Why don't you talk a little bit about some of those leadership roles? One of the things that we focus on really within the firm is empowering our lawyers to really build what they want to build. We have that entrepreneurial spirit. And you're currently on our policy committee. You work on our strategic growth committee. You head up an office, you're the head of a practice group for Labor and Employment. How did those roles influence your experience at McGlinchey?

Mag Bickford: I came here at the perfect time, at a time when McGlinchey was looking at laterals as a resource development, and appreciated that laterals had something to contribute to that end. So, I landed on a bed that was conducive to growth. But at the same time, there was a need to pull in not just laterals, but people who are diverse: diverse in their background, diverse in their experience, diverse in their perspective of life, diverse in their business development plans. All of that diversity was embraced.

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So, the first opportunity that came up to me was to get involved in smaller groups around the firm. And the most amazing thing is that I was heard, and people respected what I had to say. So, when the opportunity came up for me to take over as head of the Labor and Employment section, I eagerly embraced that.

Now, we are a small but mighty section, and that was the perfect way to start growing. Right? And the people in my section are just amazing practitioners from our legal assistants and practice assistants and all the way up to somebody like Steve Beiser, who has spent the entirety of his career here at McGlinchey.

I just can't say enough about them and they all brought me so much: their experiences and their learnings and

education. You know, Kathy Conklin, who is our ERISA practitioner, who does executive compensation and employment agreements and non-competes and non-solicitations. She helped me grow my depth in that area as well.

I'm also incredibly fortunate to have great younger attorneys here. When I came here, I was getting ready for a trial and needed help pretty immediately. In the true McGlinchey spirit, Camille Bryant, who was in our Products section, stepped up and said, "I can help." And that started a partnership of love and appreciation since almost the first day that I joined the firm. I was so very fortunate to have her come and work with me. Now she's a member and she's doing incredibly great things. And we even have a couple of new people around. I'm excited to add that in the past 6 months, we've added 4 new team members.

We have monthly meetings to talk about what's going on in the world of L&E and how we can grow our business to reflect those changes. And we all respect each other and what they have to say on these topics. So, there's accountability, there's instruction, there's development, there's ideas.

As a practice leader, you have to be intentional in how to grow your group and grow your business. We work hard to make sure that that happens. We have monthly meetings to discuss all of these topics. We have monthly meetings to talk about what's going on in the world of L&E and how we can grow our business to reflect those changes.

And we all respect each other and what they have to say on these topics. So, there's accountability, there's instruction, there's development, there's ideas. All these things are flowing that makes for a better L&E department.

Margeaux Roush: Excellent. Well, I know you do have a fabulous team in L&E and we're working to grow it every day.

Mag Bickford: Absolutely.

Margeaux Roush: What do you think would attract laterals that they can't necessarily find on our website? What's something that's not as obvious, I guess, as something that we have here at McGlinchey that, unless you really dig in, you wouldn't know about us?

Mag Bickford: Well, the first thing I'll say is we have a de facto "no jerk" rule. We want to work with people we like. If we're engaged and we respect each other and we like each other, we're going to work harder. We're going to work deeper. We're going to make our clients experience much more productive. So I feel really strongly about that. I guess I'm a collaborating person. I enjoy collaboration. And when I can get together with people that I respect and enjoy being with, it's so much easier to work harder. And that's been important to me. So the fact that we have the "no jerk" de facto rule is very valuable.

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The other thing I’ll tell you, I cannot sing the praises of our business development team any louder than I do. And I’ll share with you on this podcast my sentiments. I’ve always been more of a sales oriented person, I guess, in my practice. So it comes to me a little bit more easily than others. But I got here and was just embraced by the most amazing team that I could possibly imagine.

Heather Morse is our CMO and just a true visionary. And, you know, when you’re practicing law and you’re trying to get the I’s dotted and the T’s crossed, it’s such a wonderful, refreshing, innovative thing to have a CMO that comes to you with all these great ideas and says, you know, “let’s think about this” and “let’s think about that.” And on her team, I work close, very closely with Susan VanWingen, who is my person. She is with me every step of the way, and she is keeping me focused on everything in the community, internally, anything I need to broadcast about. I don’t mind speaking about the miracles of McGlinchey because she’s there to help me in that process.

Another important creative person that I work with very closely is Mary Pendarvis, who is the queen of imagination and “new.” She can find wonderful ways to help promote McGlinchey. We had a big client event for New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival where we had a bunch of clients and we had CLE. Every single client who was there raved about the McGlinchey swag. So what we give to our clients, not just in terms of legal advice and case management, but in the resources and assets are just amazing.

And it’s not just in the marketing team. It’s in our recruiting team. I can sing about your team as well. They’re the most wonderful, hardworking people I’ve ever met. And they’re also ones that look for the yellow in life and the creative and the new. I wish I could just take a whole hour to talk about the amazing people at McGlinchey, but they make practicing law so much more than practicing law. And I love it.

Margeaux Roush: Absolutely. I completely agree with you. We have very creative people and for a firm our size, we have an incredibly robust marketing team and business development team, as well as recruiting team. A lot of those pieces and opportunities aren’t necessarily available at firms our size. In a lot of firms, it’s only the guy with the biggest book or the multi-million dollar rainmakers who have full access to BD. You walk in here as a summer clerk, you’ve got equal access as the rainmaker. We’re going to find times and find ways to help you build what you want.

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Mag Bickford: Absolutely. You know, a lawyer once told me when I was a young lawyer that, you be you, and you find out what works for you. And because we have so many resources, you can be you.

Margeaux Roush: Absolutely. Absolutely. The other question I think that I would like to pose to you today is,

aside from all the things that we've talked about, what is it that makes you stick? What is it, aside from just the people here at McGlinchey and the stuff we talked about, what makes you not think about lateralizing somewhere else? What makes you think, this is where I want to build my career for my lifetime? Because that's not a normal sentiment for lawyers anymore. It used to be you joined a firm and you were there for life. Now there's a lot more transition and a lot more movement. But what are the things that make you really stick here and realized that McGlinchey is the place you want to call home forever?

Mag Bickford: Well, I did work at a couple other firms, and the beauty of that is you learn what you want and what you don't want. There's a lot of things I've already talked about most of them. But the most important thing that overarches all the wonderful resources and talent and great, great people we have is a phrase that I'm going to steal from my partner, Dan Plunkett: we have a culture of "yes." And from the day I started, all my cockamamie ideas, anything that I thought might lead to business development, anything that might be a good idea for our associates (and I can tell you some stories about that!), anything that I've created or thought of or envisioned, I've gotten the authority to do it. If it doesn't work, then we don't do it again.

But the concept of being myself and growing my practice is actually really special and unique. And that makes me stay the way I am and the way I want to be here. I joke all the time that they're going to catch me dead at my desk, hopefully in very, very, very many years. But I really believe that! Because I'm happy here. I like to think that the people that I work with are happy too. It certainly is my goal to make them happy.

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Margeaux Roush: Absolutely. One of the things that we've seen over the last couple of years, particularly here in our New Orleans office, is that we have been ranked as one of the Best Places to Work here in New Orleans...

Mag Bickford: And we are.

Margeaux Roush: ... under your leadership. And I know that that was important to you. Can you tell me a little bit about why that is important?

Mag Bickford: Well, when I started as managing member almost three years ago, we had mostly empty offices. There was some feedback that New Orleans was not a high growth area, that this wasn't a place that we wanted to invest in. And I knew that was dead wrong.

My goal as managing member of this office was to create a place that people wanted to work. Now I'm very fortunate to work with a senior admin team who also are committed to those goals. Once we figured out that we had to bring joy to work, then all of a sudden, guess what? People wanted to work here. And now we're at a place where we don't have enough room for more people. So don't worry, I have that problem solved too. But the point of the matter is that we spend, particularly for those of us who are in the office, we spend more time

with each other than we do with our families. And if we're not happy and growing and seeing opportunity, that gets to be a pretty miserable place. So my goal, and I think I've done a decent job of making it happen, is to make it happen.

Another thing that has been such a delight in this office is we have grown by laterals and we have grown by associates. The laterals are wowed. They're just so enamored of the opportunities here and the happiness here. I guess my favorite part of all the equations is our associates. So for the first time in years, we've got a large group of younger lawyers who are just so enthusiastic and just wanting to grow and develop. And one of my personal favorite things to do is mentor young associates or people new to the practice of law. And I get to do it every day, all day. And it's been pretty fantastic.

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So we were really excited, because of that fabulous group of young associates or new associates, this year we won the New Orleans Bar and Grill! This was a fundraiser for army veterans who have been injured and we rallied behind the mission, but we also rallied behind McGlinchey. And they came up with creative ideas. They worked tirelessly, with the help of our staff who were also equally involved. Anne Leche and Lori Graff worked as hard as you could possibly imagine to make a perfect event with the associates.

And guess what? It was a clean sweep. We won best overall. We won best team spirit...

Margeaux Roush: There were six and I'll actually read them for you because I think they're important! We got best overall, most team spirit, crowd favorite, most creative, and best dessert. So I'm enthusiastic. I know that that all of our associates were so excited to participate. And that kind of level of excitement, to have that kind of balance of fun at work, as well as work at work, and to be able to have fun and work with the people that you have to see all day. It's a very unique combination and it's something that not a lot of law firms have.

Mag Bickford: It's intentional. You have to build that. And it doesn't happen by itself. So we've all worked together to make that intentional process and so far, so good.

When you see the managing partner of the firm and the managing partners of the offices coming together to do trivia in a lightning round at lunchtime, and you have everyone from the secretaries all the way up to the busiest lawyers at the firm take 30 minutes out of their time and connect with each other that way – it's an incredible thing to watch.

Margeaux Roush: And it's nice to see that it's from the top down. I mean, we have a Ministry of Fun and a lot of that came out of COVID and Wellness Works and trying to make everybody feel integrated. And when you see, you know, the managing partner of the firm and the managing partners of the offices coming together to do trivia in a lightning round at lunchtime, and you have everyone from the secretaries all the way up to, you know, the busiest lawyers at the firm take 30 minutes out of their time and connect with each other that way – it's an incredible thing to watch.

So, Mag, I think one of the things that we talk about a lot throughout your journey is having the resources available to you to get your job done, because you wear a lot of hats, as we've discussed. And I think it's really important to recognize that you do have the tools that you need and the resources that you need, and the people that you need, to really grow and do what you do. So tell me a little bit about the team that supports you.

Mag Bickford: Yeah, absolutely. My day is pretty chock a block full and I couldn't do all the things that I do without the amazing staff. As you can probably tell from all the things I'm talking about, having fun, feeling collaborative, feeling I can trust somebody, knowing somebody has my back are all pretty important things to me.

And I can't help but mention all the other people in our staff who just, just amazing things. I try at least once a day to walk the halls and tell everybody hello, see how they're doing. And when that happens, it's just the biggest affirmation, because I am greeted by smiles and joys – and maybe sometimes not smiles and joys, but we get to talk about it.

But last but not least, I'm always greeted by food. We are the most eating firm I've ever worked at. So it's a big temptation when I do walk around the office. But breaking bread together is always the best way to get to know each other. So that's a good plus too.

Margeaux Roush: Absolutely. We have the most amazing people that support our teams. And one of the coolest things is that they've been here longer than you and I have.

Mag Bickford: Absolutely. We do a lot of fun things. You mentioned our trivia and we've got book club and we've got all these activities. But Anne Leche, who is our regional administrator, another incredibly creative person, works with me to come up with fun, new things that everybody gets to enjoy. So I have been squirreling chocolate chip cookie recipes because we're going to have a big chocolate chip cookie contest soon. And we like to do things like that. So, in fact, we had a lovely pizza event today at lunch. So food brings people together! And I'm certainly not going to deny that.

I am so excited, my favorite time of the year is summer associate time.

Margeaux Roush: Yes.

Mag Bickford: And that is coming soon. And we take a lot of time and effort to plan events to help bond them with each other, and to bond them with the firm. And we've got some doozies planned!

Margeaux Roush: Absolutely. Is there anything else you would like to share with the people about McGlinchey and Why McGlinchey and your lateral journey here before we wrap up?

[Michael Ferach] built a platform called #McGlincheyForward, that actually was the culture of yes. Right? That was a devotion and commitment to inclusion. It was a culture of identifying things that needed to change, or things that didn't work and breaking the molds and making them change.

Mag Bickford: One of the things that I do want to talk about that's very special, if you listen to any of our McGlinchey podcasts, you probably have heard this before, is, in conjunction with that culture of, yes, is an amazing managing member. Because when he took over about the same time I took over as a managing member of this office, almost three years ago. He built a platform called #McGlincheyForward, that actually was the culture of yes. Right? That was a devotion and commitment to inclusion. It was a culture of identifying things that needed to change, or things that didn't work and breaking the molds and making them change. My sincere thanks goes to Michael Ferachi for having the vision to enable that culture of yes, to make a better mousetrap here at McGlinchey.

Margeaux Roush: I hear a lot from Michael, "if I haven't told you no yet, or recently, you're not asking me for enough." If you're just getting yeses, you're not pushing hard enough. So that's, that's one of the things that he likes to say.

Well, Mag, thank you so much for sharing all of this great information with us about your practice group, about the office here at McGlinchey, about the firm in general, and all of our incredible, incredible people that make up McGlinchey Stafford.

Thank you for your time today. We really appreciate your sharing your thoughts.

Mag Bickford: Happy to, anytime.

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