



# Next Gen

This week's Q&A with



**Sara Longtain**

Houston Partner [Sara Longtain](#), a member of Locke Lord's Labor and Employment Practice Group, works with employers to build and maintain a healthy relationship with their greatest asset: their people. No client partnership is the same, and Sara's contributions come in all shapes and sizes — working with human resources professionals to administer leave under the Americans with Disabilities Act or the Family and Medical Leave Act; negotiating executive employment or separation arrangements on behalf of an employer or management team; conducting workplace investigations; drafting, implementing and enforcing policies and agreements; and providing business-focused representation in employment disputes.



## More About Sara

### What's the biggest challenge you've faced in your career?

Being comfortable, if not completely satisfied, with imbalance. This applies to the allocation of my time between work and home, the percentage of my hybrid practice spent in transactional versus litigation matters, the volume of work I perform versus bring in the door and the attention I give to caring for myself versus others. I once heard the father of a groom say, "A marriage is 80/20, not 50/50." He explained it is impossible for partners to balance the marital load at all times. Rather, each will at times carry 80 percent, and other times, 20 percent. This principle applies equally to the illusive concept of "work-life balance," a popular topic in the legal profession. We have an unlimited number of roles to play in life. I am a mother, stepmother, wife, sister, daughter, friend, attorney, mentor, mentee and the list goes on. It is impossible to dedicate ourselves equally to all roles simultaneously. Thus, every achievement in one role necessarily comes at a cost to another.

If we fail to align our decisions about how to allocate time between roles with personal values or priorities (i.e., how we measure success), any success achieved in a role to which we dedicate time can be overshadowed by feelings of failure in the one or more of the other roles we neglect. Over the years, I have learned to be mindful of my personal values and allow them to guide daily decisions about how I allocate myself among my roles. When successful in this endeavor, I am generally comfortable with the inevitable imbalance that results.

### How did you know that you wanted to practice law? // What inspired you to become a lawyer?

During my junior year in high school, I visited Washington, D.C., on a class trip. We visited all the must-see spots — the Smithsonian, Lincoln Memorial, Capitol and Arlington National Cemetery — but none impressed me more than the U.S. Supreme Court. As cheesy as it sounds, standing

on the front steps of THAT courthouse and observing a portion of the oral arguments . . . well, it gave me the “feels.” Our trip happened to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Supreme Court’s landmark decision in *Roe v. Wade*. Thus, I went from the steps of the physical location where the supreme law of the land is made, to observing our constitutional rights in action. Though I meandered a bit in college, I landed fairly quickly on law school, and this trip was pivotal in my decision.

**Who has had the biggest professional influence in your life? // Did you have a mentor? If so, tell us the most important things you learned from them.**

I was raised by a single mom whose “hustle” took her from teaching English, to an English administrator role with the district, to selling classroom curriculum to districts across the country. My mom managed to raise two kids, largely on her own without any family around for support, while achieving the highest levels of professional success. During her career, my mother moved effortlessly between a classroom and a boardroom, seamlessly transitioned from educating students to selling curriculum to administrators, and successfully navigated the move from traditional to digital classrooms (in particular, she started out selling textbooks and retired at the height of the transition to online curriculum).

Boiled down, my mom taught me the art of “selling” and the skill of adaptability, both of which are particularly relevant to a career in big law.

That said, I would be remiss not to give a shout-out to my colleague, Houston Partner Mitch Tiras, who continues to teach me the business of law.

**What do you do to relax and reset after a long week?**

A Whistle Pig Rye on the rocks, a game of H-O-R-S-E with my favorite people (Zane, 4; Everett, 7; Jaydyn, 16; and Simon, 38), and sleep (preferably in that order).

**Tell us your favorite book, movie or TV show and why you like it.**

*Old School*, because 16 years later, I still cry-laugh when I watch it. “Earmuffs,” “Cheeez,” the “trust tree,” Will Ferrell taking a horse tranquilizer to the throat . . . I could go on, but ‘nuff said.

**What would be your fantasy career if you weren’t a lawyer?**

Own and operate a small vineyard in Sonoma, California, with my best friend, Simon (see above).



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