

Locke Lord's Clements: "We got the team we wanted"

The merger between Locke Lord and Edwards Wildman Palmer is less than a month old, but chair Jerry Clements' term at the top has already stood the test of time. by Natasha Bernal

Clements was named chair of legacy Locke Liddell & Sapp in 2006 (it became Locke Lord in 2007 after the merger with Lord Bissell & Brook) before taking on the same role in Locke Lord. She has now taken up a similar position at the newly merged firm.

Having been re-elected in 2014, one of her tasks was to change the course of the firm's history again in its high-profile merger with Edwards Wildman this year (12 January 2015). She was instrumental in the orchestration of what appears to have turned out to be a surprisingly smooth transition.

"It was an honour and a privilege," she says. "There are challenges that come with doing any proceedings. I'm extremely driven to make this merger a success so that it will make our firm stronger and our clients happier."

She says that the merger was "one of the biggest ones so far. More lawyers, more clients, more offices".

"Locke Lord has a great history of doing successful mergers," she claims. "This is our fourth combination in the last 25 years and has been viewed as very successful. We've come away with a combined firm that is stronger than the predecessor firms.

"It involves a lot of effort from a lot of people at practice group level so that lawyers can work across offices in specific areas of expertise. There's a strong and focused group of people that will be working on integration."

In the run-up to the merger much market gossip focused on the extent to which partners from Edwards Wildman in London would come on board. Any speculation about Locke Lord missing out couldn't be farther from the truth, Clements insists, adding that the triad of Locke Lord,



Edwards Wildman and Cooley coordinated the formers' merger and the latter's office launch in London in harmony.

"It wasn't coincidental," she adds. "For some time, long before we ever began talking to Edwards Wildman, the Edwards Wildman partners in London had been talking to Cooley. That move was already in the works by the time we were in the picture. Because of the space issues we wanted to get that finalised so that we can start out with the same partners."

Despite the fact that most of the London office wasn't moving to the merged firm (9 January 2015), Clements said she negotiated a deal that would suit the firm's interests.

"We got the team that we wanted and the team that we think fits in best with our strategic plan around the world," she argues. "Most of those decisions had been made long before we came on the scene."

John Olsen may have been the only partner moving over to Locke Lord Edwards from Edwards Wildman this year, but Clements says the firm has added 10 new fee-earners to its London practice. It also offloaded Edwards Wildman's London office to Cooley, which has taken up the lease.

There are plans to expand energy, corporate, insolvency and real estate in the future, although Clements doesn't have a preference for candidates from UK or US firms.

"We're looking at both, what we're looking for is just top-notch lawyers who can really add to the expertise and the platform that they are dealing with," she says.

It may be easier to see a smooth transition in London, which was one of the first office moves during the merger.

"Fortunately everyone has had a desk, all the basics. We've had a couple of glitches with the email distribution list but we've been quite fortunate that so far there have been no major glitches," she says.

Other offices, including New York and Washington DC, may prove to be more complicated to move because of the overlap of partners, practice areas and the sheer volume of people.

So what has Clements achieved out of Locke Lord Edward's merger apart from lawyers?

"We've got 23 offices; I always say that in each office you have a healthy structure if you have work that is generated locally, work that is being exported and work that's being imported," she explains. "For those of us on the Locke Lord side, it gives us 650 new colleagues to be new business sources."

The firm has two new combined offices in Tokyo and Istanbul, the latter focusing more on corporate and transactional work with two partners and eight associates. Clements believes that through these new regions, there is room for great growth potential at the merged firm.

"Partners have already visited our London office and are looking at ways to use their experience to cross-sell their entire MENA region," she adds.

Setting aside the potential pipelines that the firm plans to set up in its new regions of influence, Clements' focus is directed towards making sure that Locke Lord's investment pays off.

"First and foremost our strategy is to get this new platform integrated, getting everybody to know one another and focus on the new opportunities as a combination," she comments. "We need to continue to think strategically and figure out how to use this expertise to the benefit of the clients. We want to be able to communicate our new strengths to the legal market in general. We'll continue to look for ways to do some additional strategic growth."

"It's a very hot and competitive legal market in the US," she says, although the firm looks likely to step up to the challenge with investment in its offices around the world, which is something that clients are asking for. "For us this particular consolidation was important because it allows us to better serve our clients, gain additional expertise and another platform."

Having done this before, Clements has stepped up to the challenge and is confident that the firm will be able to quickly adapt to its new cultural identity.

"We think it's going to be beneficial for our lawyers or we wouldn't have done this," she says. "Despite depending upon things that are beyond our control, we expect 2015 to be a positive year for us."