

New Mayer Brown Chair On Shaping A Global 'One-Stop' Firm

By **J. Edward Moreno**

Law360 (May 26, 2021, 3:20 PM EDT) -- Mayer Brown LLP recently selected Jon D. Van Gorp as its next chair, marking the first handover of that role in nine years.



Jon D. Van Gorp

Van Gorp, who is based in New York and Chicago, is slated to serve at least one three-year term as chair of the firm, starting June 1. He will succeed Paul Theiss, who has held the position since 2012.

According to Van Gorp, one of Theiss' biggest accomplishments during his tenure was building a "one-firm" culture across all of Mayer Brown's offices.

"Paul likes to say the practice of law is a team sport, and people here really adopted that," Van Gorp

said.

Mayer Brown's strategic plan, which was updated in 2019, includes expanding its presence on the West Coast so it can better serve the technology industry there, as well as boosting transaction, private equity and capital markets capabilities across offices.

One of the firm's biggest strengths remains its international presence, Van Gorp said.

"So we can be a one-stop shop with industry expertise for you to handle these matters without having to use multiple law firms," Van Gorp said. "And that's been pretty successful for us."

Van Gorp spoke with Law360 Pulse about the firm's strategic plan and his goals as the firm's next chair. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Is there anything outside the firm's current initiatives and strategic plan that you plan to implement?

I think that my job is really to keep us pointed towards our strategic plan that we updated in 2019. And as a member of the management committee, I've been pretty focused on that for my time on the management committee. And I was part of the committee that drafted the strategic plan. So as chair, that's going to continue to be my priority because I think it's the right blueprint for the growth and development of the firm.

How would you describe the firm's strategic growth plan? What markets or practices are you looking to expand?

So the strategic plan has a couple of elements to it. We're the only global law firm to have about 200 or more lawyers in Hong Kong, New York and London. That's the global backbone of trading markets around the world. So, that puts us in a position of strength, and geographically building on that is important to us. So, it's no surprise that Hong Kong, London and New York are growth targets for us. And we've grown pretty impressively in New York recently and will continue to grow there.

But we also in the U.S. have added the West Coast, such as California, to our growth plans because we think that a lot of the emerging company growth is great for law firms, new business with those companies, as they quickly go through life cycles of startups to public companies. So California generally, with an emphasis on Northern California, is a key part of our strategy.

And within Northern California, we want to focus on technology, because we find that that's a really important part of the new economy. We've got a nice technology base right now, but we want to enhance it. And I'm not talking about just intellectual property lawyers, but corporate lawyers who do technology deals and the venture capital in the emerging market space. Those are big targets of ours, and Northern California is the bull's-eye for us. So we're really focused on that office in that market.

So that plan was updated in 2019, but of course the pandemic has happened since then. How has the firm adapted the strategic plan during the pandemic?

So the strategic plan doesn't really address some of the things that are interesting issues relative to the pandemic, like if there is going to be a change in whether people work remotely or in offices, and some of that stuff is very temporary in my opinion. So it's more about where we focus our investments in terms of geographies and practice priorities.

But with regard to practice priorities, we did shift a little bit, and we added restructuring. Because we believe that as a result of the pandemic, there has been some economic change, adversely for some businesses, that will lead to global restructuring opportunities once the government support and assistance as part of the COVID-19 relief plan starts to dissipate.

Things like retail and commercial real estate are often cited as examples of that. So we added restructuring capabilities in London and in the U.S., and we have more on the way, because we think it's the right time to build that group when we have the ability to hire the lawyers and before all the

work hits. So that is a change that came through the pandemic.

But the other areas that we're prioritizing that are in the plan are funds, which is key because that's how capital is raised these days, through fund structures, not through public companies as much. So like many firms, we're growing our fund practice and have particularly grown that very recently in New York, pretty substantially in fact.

What tends to be the firm's pitch to clients?

Clients tend to look, in our opinion, for lawyers who can help them everywhere in the world with every aspect of the project so that they don't have to hire multiple law firms, so they can hire one law firm who can do the work in multiple offices where the project exists and then through multiple practice areas. And we have a very good track record there.

Our top 50 clients, we've done work for them in two or more offices, and with 45 of those clients, we've done work in three or more offices. So we've really been successful at having the clients use us in multiple offices on engagements, as well as through multiple practice areas. And one of the pitches we often make to the client is we can handle the regulatory side of it, we can handle the corporate side of it and the finance side of it.

We pride ourselves on our collaborative one-firm culture, where we all work together as one partnership to achieve the common goals of our clients. And as a result, we have a really high commitment to each other's work quality and consistency and client service.

How have your predecessors gone about achieving that one-firm culture?

It's really Paul. It's really one of the signatures in his tenure as chair, his ability to do this. Paul is a real relationship builder. He's built relationships with the partners all over our platform and spurred them to kind of come together for this purpose of, the joint initiatives collaborating together, accomplishing more as a team than individually. Paul likes to say the practice of law is a team sport, and people here really adopted that.

I do a lot of lateral hiring in my job, and I have a lot of lateral hires tell me, "Wow, you told me this was a collaborative kind of team place. I couldn't imagine that until I got here; it's even better than I thought it would be." So I think that's a signature of Paul's leadership and is something that is really fully baked into the firm in terms of its culture and its values.

--Editing by Aaron Pelc.