



July 26th, 2010 | 12:30 pm

[Voice of Experience: Annica Lindegren, Partner, White & Case](#)



By Melissa J. Anderson (New York City)

For Annica Lindegren, partner at [White & Case](#) and head of the firm's bank finance practice in Germany, a keen focus on providing top service for her clients has been one key to her success – the other is finding a unique balance between her work life and family life. Working in Frankfurt during the week, Lindegren heads home to her family in Spain on the weekend.

She says, “In a sense I have found my work/life balance. When I'm home my priority is my family, and when I am here [in Frankfurt] my priority is my clients (but of course my family is always a top priority). The clients are aware of my travel situation, and it hasn't affected their view of working with me or the team here.”

And the balance seems to work – Lindegren expresses pride in the team she's built in Germany, and the success it has seen since the start in 2001.

She continues proudly, “Within 3 years [of starting at White & Case], we were nominated for The Bank Finance Firm of the Year in Germany by [JUVE](#), a guide to the legal profession which ranks lawyers and law firms in Germany. And we won in 2006. We were nominated last year again – all in all we've been nominated 4 times with one win.”

Building a Team in Germany

Born in Sweden, Lindegren moved to the US for high school. Following this, she says, “I moved from sunny Miami to rainy London for university.” After graduating from law school in 1989 and becoming an English solicitor, she joined the finance group of [Clifford Chance](#) in 1991, working with bank finance and capital markets products for about 7 years. She was then asked to take a secondment to Frankfurt. “No one else wanted to go!” she says with a laugh.

She continues, “They said I’d be firefighting for 3 weeks... and immediately asked which flat I wanted to move into. My husband came over with our daughter who was a year and half old. I took a 2-year secondment package – and 12 years later, I’m still here, believe it or not.”

“I was helping to build the Frankfurt finance practice at the firm [Clifford Chance] when I was head-hunted by White & Case. They wanted to build out their Frankfurt office. I became a partner at White & Case in 2001. When I joined here there was no bank finance practice – now we’re 8 partners, 8 junior partners and a gang of associates.”

Lindegren says she got a lot of support in building the team, as well. “I enjoyed being able to build something from scratch and received a lot of help, assistance, and support from within White & Case backing me up. To work with people who believe in you is very lucky.”

Clients: First, Second, and Third

Lindegren is emphatic about the importance of delivering the best service possible for her clients. She says, “I learned a lot from a former partner at White & Case named Maurice Allen – he had an amazing ability with clients, making them feel like they were the most important thing since sliced bread.”

She continues, “His client focus was second to none – it just came natural to him. It isn’t just about doing a good job – it’s about making the clients feel they are important, giving them treatment that is special. I’ve tried to adopt that. Clients come first, second, and third in my working life. When they are content with the work we do as a team, it’s a great joy to me.”

One of the reasons the practice has been successful, she says, is the team’s flexibility and drive to adjust to market conditions. She says, “In the old days of the leveraged finance world, deals were just falling in! We became known for listening to the client and understanding their needs.”

Lindegren adds, “Over the past few years, we’ve had to rethink our focus and products. Our clients and banks, what are they doing? And we’re succeeding – so far, so good. We are always asking, ‘What can we do for you?’ We are constantly trying to reinvent ourselves, thinking, ‘Is the market confident? Are banks lending money again? What are they going to come to me with?’”

In fact, she continues, “The team at White & Case has a lot of different focuses – our expertise level is not just one product, it’s many different products. And we continue to build our expertise.”

Defining Success: Women in Law

“Are there challenges for women in finding success? It all depends on what you mean by success,” Lindegren relays. “When I arrived I was the only female partner at White & Case in Germany. It’s becoming better and better – of course, it is still a male dominated business. Our [bank finance] team has many women. Maybe because I’m a woman they related to me more or were more open to me – so I hired a bunch. And they’ve made careers for themselves.”

She continues, “It’s a challenge for young, talented lawyers to take time off to have children – it’s more difficult, and slower climbing up the ladder. We have a number of part time women. I have talented women and wanted to retain that talent. They work 50% and do transaction work – not the boring stuff. Then they hand over to another partner when they aren’t here – it’s how they juggle it. Working part time and looking after your family doesn’t mean you’re not a success.”

“They’re not equity partners, though,” she says. “To get to my level it would be much tougher. I don’t see part time lawyers making it to partner. But maybe. There’s no reason they shouldn’t, frankly – as long as the client is happy.”

Lindegren explains how White & Case’s women’s initiative began. “It started as the result of a task force. The firm decided that we needed to focus on how to attract talented women – they’re 50% of the workforce – and retain them. For maternity leave in my country [Sweden], girls can take a year off. In Germany it’s three years. We encourage them to come back – we try to provide flexibility for them, but there needs to be commitment on both sides. It’s important to try that to retain your female lawyers so they don’t walk away.”

Advice – Take Leadership, Make Time for Yourself

To young women in the industry, she says, “You have to stand up for yourself. Don’t be afraid to be a woman. You’re going to be a minority. If you want to take leadership, then take leadership. In fact, many of our clients prefer to work with women – they always say we’re ‘much more fun,’ or more relaxed, or they can crack jokes in a different way.”

And, she adds, be grateful for advancements in technology. “I wish the technology had been around when I was first starting out. When I think back at the hours and hours I used to proofread documents – or feeding in each page into the fax machine, or the hours we had to work to do the simplest things! When I first got my computer, I used to put flower pots on it – I didn’t know what to do with it! Life would have been so much easier as a junior lawyer.”

As women advance in their careers, she says it’s important to take charge. “Taking leadership is most important at this time – there’s the assumption that you will work hard and be good at what you do. Don’t be afraid to share ideas with senior leadership – and it’s the same in every industry whether you’re a woman or a man. Volunteer for things. Women have a tendency of letting other people take that role – it’s about not being afraid to show you’re top quality.”

And Lindegren points out, remember take time for yourself. “Every person should have balance – you’re a better lawyer if you do. I encourage my team to go home. There’s no reason to be in

the office just to be in the office. It's unhealthy! Take a holiday. I'm not impressed by someone saying they have 20 days [of holiday time] they haven't taken. Go and rest. Be as good as you can be when you come back."

She continues, "My free time is for my husband and daughter. We also do a lot of entertaining in Spain."

Lindgren jokes, "My husband wants me to take up golf – but my golf instructor suggested I should take up yoga instead! I like to keep fit – mountain biking, running, swimming, skiing. Since we live on the coast in Spain, we take every opportunity to go out on the water. My husband is a skipper. I have an active life. And I read a lot – right now I'm reading Michael Lewis' book about the crisis."

Looking forward, she predicts, "In 10 years, I'll be on the beach! I'm turning 50 next year – and I don't want to be working when I'm 60. I'll either be with my family in Spain or traveling the world with my husband."