

# AHEAD OF THE CURVE

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**by michael heron**

Mariana Norton dos Reis, who leads the corporate and M&A practice in Portugal at Cuatrecasas, is one of the top rainmakers in the M&A space, in a field largely dominated by men. According to Norton dos Reis, law firms still have a long way to go in order to support female lawyers on their career progression, but that bridging the gender gap goes beyond the responsibility of the sector and starts at home. The lawyer gives great insight for any young legal practitioner starting their journey, as to what it takes to reach the top. The war to retain talent is not gender specific but law firms are clearly missing a big opportunity by not doing more to retain and nurture its top female lawyers.

## **Describe a typical day for you as an M&A lawyer at Cuatrecasas...**

Each day is different: that is probably the reason why M&A is so much fun, but also so challenging. I may have a certain day very well planned, but I receive an unexpected call and must enter a meeting and end up in an intense negotiation session the whole day, trying to cut a deal or to build a bridge to reach an agreement. Some days (very often prior to the COVID-outbreak and now more and more often again) I have to take a plane somewhere to attend an international conference to learn new trends or to share experiences and views and build networking, but in an ordinary day I drive to the office, start the day with a nice coffee with my team and have a full day reviewing

contracts or memos, attending in-person or zoom/teams meetings with clients, or taking part in internal meetings with my partners or associates to plan some corporate events or to discuss market trends.

## **How do you think your firm and team approaches deals in a way that differentiates you from your competitors?**

At Cuatrecasas we focus on understanding the deal, identifying material risks and building solutions. We identify the different areas of expertise that are material for the deal and engage the different legal specialists that have value-added contributions on the team, we get the local knowledge and market insights and procure to establish an efficient and cooperative working atmosphere with the counterparties.

## **What challenges have you faced during your career to get to where you are now?**

Probably the more difficult challenges were to have the self-confidence, emotional and physical capacity, and trust in my instinct to survive the very bad working days. Resilience, trust and positive energy were crucial during my career. Another important challenge was not to feel bad about myself when I could not be as good as I wanted in all dimensions and roles, prioritising, and focusing on what really matters in the private and professional life and reaching a work-life balance that made me happy at work and with my family and friends.

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