

What it takes to lead

Linklaters' partners are responsible for shaping the path ahead for those following behind. Sharing insights and personal experience, some of our Luxembourg's partners examine the lessons learned on their path to leadership.



Introduction

Leadership is rarely a straight path. It is built over time, through experience, judgement and the opportunities we create for ourselves and others. At Linklaters, our partnership reflects this. Colleagues with different backgrounds, perspectives and career paths share leadership responsibilities and contribute to a culture where people can grow, lead and thrive.

With this series, we chose to highlight all our female partners. Each of them has built a substantial practice, leads important client relationships and plays an active role in the business community. By sharing their stories, we want to offer real, relatable examples of different ways to build a long-term, sustainable career in our firm and to show what it takes to lead in this environment.

Our partners advise on complex matters and their visibility and influence come from sustained performance, strong client relationships and a genuine commitment to developing others. In the following portraits, they share what it takes to lead in practice: how they approach key decisions, navigate challenges and turn pivotal moments into opportunities for their teams, their clients and their own careers.



Nicki Kayser

National Managing Partner

What it takes to lead

Leadership and decision making at the top

Leadership and decision-making start with taking responsibility for clients, for matters and for the team, and acting with authenticity and integrity. As a partner in the Investment Funds practice, I provide vision and leadership while working closely with colleagues at all levels within my team and across Linklaters, shaping how we staff and run mandates, empowering others and how we support our clients over the long term with an entrepreneurial mindset. Within the team, I aim to create a caring environment where people feel able to speak up, test ideas and take on responsibility early, knowing that they have support behind them as humans and as professionals.

"I place particular emphasis on helping people find the roles and responsibilities that suit them..."

and on guiding them when things need to be adjusted. Some of the most valuable decisions are not the big, visible ones, but the day-to-day choices that build trust, confidence and true collaboration in the team.

Bringing a distinct, ambitious and bold perspective to leadership and decision-making is an asset for the team, for our clients and for the firm as a whole. I use my experience to support, empower and develop others, including in more delicate moments, and to contribute actively to Linklaters' culture by sharing knowledge, listening, mentoring colleagues and encouraging a collaborative, inclusive and jointly owned way of working, where we consider views and take decisions together.



Silke Bernard

Investment Funds Partner

Work-life integration and career pacing

Work-life integration is a continuous act of balance, and that balance shifts over time. I spend so much time at work that I could not imagine doing something I am not passionate about.

But, like many of us, I want both: a demanding, interesting job and a fulfilling family life. Having three young children has undeniably influenced my career, including the pace at which my practice has developed. At the same time, my periods of maternity leave created invaluable opportunities to step back, reflect on the career I had chosen and confirm that it remained the right path for me. My progression to counsel and then to partner at Linklaters thus felt like a natural step.

I now work on a part-time arrangement – almost full time, but not quite. Having a regular afternoon each week with my children gives me the energy I need to perform at my best at work. It allows me to be fully focused as a tax partner when I am working and (mostly) fully present as a parent when I am not.

"Flexibility and adaptability are essential in this context."

For me, leadership means finding practical ways to make things work for clients, for the team and for my family, and being open about how we can support others to do the same.



Danièle Buchler

Tax Partner

What it takes to lead

Resilience, navigating setbacks and redefining success over time

Resilience, for me, is less about dramatic turning points and more about how we navigate the many smaller setbacks that shape a long career. Files will not always go the way we hoped, opportunities will sometimes go to someone else, and there will be phases where personal and professional demands pull in different directions. What matters is learning to see these moments as part of a longer journey, rather than as an immediate verdict on our abilities.

Over time, this has changed my view of success. Early on, I tended to measure it mainly through hard work, steep learning curves and the pace of progression. Today, success also means being able to sustain my energy over time, feeling at peace with the choices I make and knowing that my contribution serves clients, colleagues and the wider team. Supporting others, especially those who underestimate their own work, is an important part of that.

I also believe it is important to recognise that we cannot do everything at once. We are not superheroes. Accepting that has helped me to focus on what really matters in each stage and to be more open about the fact that everyone experiences doubt, pressure or moments of fatigue. Creating space to talk about these realities, without seeing them as weakness, is in itself a form of resilience. For me,

"... what it takes to lead is the ability to hold ambition and humanity together..."

to acknowledge when the path is not linear, to treat setbacks as information rather than failure, and to model a definition of success that leaves room for both high standards and self-respect, for ourselves and for those we work with.



Eliane Dejardin
Botelho

Capital Markets and Banking Partner

What it takes to lead in Private Equity

Women remain underrepresented in private equity, particularly in senior roles. For me, leading in this sector means combining strong technical expertise with a clear intention to widen the path for others. My practice focuses on private capital clients navigating complex, multi-jurisdictional transactions, and over the past 15 years I have seen how diverse teams can improve decision making and strengthen relationships with investors, management teams and other stakeholders.

Cross-border work has always been central to my career. Growing up between German and French cultures and studying in different countries naturally drew me towards an international environment. Starting my career at Linklaters in Luxembourg and then working in our Frankfurt and Paris offices has given me a broad perspective on how private equity operates across jurisdictions and how inclusive leadership can look in different markets.

As a partner in the corporate team, I advise international clients on demanding and fast-paced transactions in an industry that is constantly evolving.

"What motivates me is not only the complexity of the work, but also the opportunity to help shape a more balanced profession."

I co chair a working group dedicated to supporting women in building careers in private equity, creating spaces for networking, mentoring and practical advice.



Florence Forster

Mainstream Corporate Partner

What it takes to lead

Career ownership, confidence and opportunities

Career ownership has been a gradual process rather than a single decision. Building my career at one firm has allowed me to undertake secondments in other practice areas and jurisdictions and work closely with brilliant colleagues across the network for sophisticated international clients. These opportunities have broadened my perspective, deepened my expertise and helped me refine how I approach complex matters.

Confidence has grown mainly through experience: working repeatedly on high-profile cross-border transactions, coordinating diverse stakeholders and seeing clients rely on my advice. Over time, this has shaped how I make decisions under pressure and how I support clients through complex situations.

"Leadership is a cycle, not a destination."

Now that I am a partner, I try to create space for others to take on challenging work and to share what I have learned, recognising that the path is not always straightforward. That includes involving people early in high impact matters, encouraging them to voice their views and backing them as they take on greater responsibility.

Linklaters' culture and the many programmes available across the firm play an important role in helping us build and own our careers. My aim is to support the team (and more broadly the associates within the firm) in shaping careers that reflect their own ambitions and priorities and to make sure they feel they have real authorship in their development.



Catherine Kremer

Mainstream Corporate Partner

Navigating bias, credibility and authority in the legal profession

Navigating bias, credibility and authority in the legal profession is not a one off challenge, but a thread that runs through a career. Growing up in France with Sri Lankan heritage, I became aware quite early that people's assumptions can shape how they see you and what they expect of you. That has followed me into my professional life: who is expected to lead a call, present to a client or take ownership of a matter is not always neutral.

"Over time, I learned that credibility is not given; we build it through preparation, clear and high-quality advice and how we behave under pressure."

I have also seen that bias can be subtle as well as overt. It can show up in who is interrupted, whose ideas are picked up, or who is assumed to be "support" rather than the lead adviser. These moments have made me very intentional about leading in a human and fair way. When I see this happening, I try to address it calmly, reset expectations and make sure that I and others do not internalise those signals. Each time we claim our space, back a colleague in the room or redirect a question to the person who should answer it, we reinforce a different standard of what authority looks like.

For me, leadership in this area means using my experience and background to open up that space more deliberately for others. I aim to create an environment where people feel treated fairly and able to speak with confidence, where different styles and stories of leadership are recognised as valid and where authority rests on substance and integrity, not on stereotypes or who speaks the loudest. Bias may not disappear, but we can choose how we respond to it and how we support one another to be seen, heard and trusted.



Melinda Perera

Capital Markets and Banking Partner

What it takes to lead

Mentorship, sponsorship and building allyship

Mentorship, sponsorship and allyship have become key elements of my approach to leadership. As Diversity and Inclusion and HR partner, I focus on creating practical, sustained support for colleagues at every stage of their careers. I actively sponsor and mentor people across our global network, both through Linklaters' programmes and through ongoing, informal conversations that continue beyond any formal framework.

My commitment extends beyond the firm: I coach rising talents through local professional associations and support our clients by involving them in our leadership initiatives. My goal is to use my position and experience to open doors, create visibility for emerging leaders and

*"... ensure that people feel backed,
not just advised."*

I want to help build a culture where everyone has real opportunities to progress and we consistently lift one another up.



Claire Prospert

Investment Funds Partner

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