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2012 Top 10 30-Something: Julie Pradel

Interviews and Profiles





Senior Counsel

The Williams Companies, Inc.

Age: 39

Proudest achievement: “My two kids.”

Having integrity

The Williams Companies, Inc., includes various entities in the midstream and pipeline industry, and its structure calls for Julie Pradel to constantly communicate with business partners within the company, and lawyers and commercial teams at other companies. In her role, Pradel has assisted in several multimillion-dollar pipeline expansion projects and the transfer and sale of onshore transportation and gathering assets. She is heavily involved in advising Williams on commercial, contract, and regulatory and compliance issues. To be successful, Pradel says first and foremost, she has to be approachable and have integrity.

“If you’re good to your customers, employees and community, that’s going to keep you in business,” says Pradel. Integrity is a universal business value that she learned about when working at her parents’ dry cleaning shop while growing up. Today, she says integrity guides her handling of pipeline matters, during which she encounters familiar faces. “The more I do these transactions, the more I deal with many of the same people, lawyers representing different companies or parts of companies,” she says. “If word gets out that you don’t have integrity — that you’re willing to say one thing to somebody, and something different to someone else — it will make it hard to get the bigger deals done.”

Pradel says she manages her reputation by being receptive, and embracing the opportunity to learn from the other party, who sometimes will expose her to new angles. “And I treat the big guys the same as the little guys: with respect,” she says. Pradel approaches her business partners the same way. “I never know who is going to call — an engineer, a customer service representative, a vice president — but I try to do a good job for everybody.” She hopes her efforts encourage people to return to her for help. In fact, she uses her approachability as personal performance metric. “One of the best ways to find out how you are doing is by looking at how much people ask you to do,” she says.

Much of Pradel's work focuses on one Williams-owned interstate natural gas pipeline, the Transcontinental Gas Pipe Line Company, LLC (Transco), but not just on its expansion projects. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) regulates Transco and all of its rate components. Changing these rates requires the company to file a rate case under the Natural Gas Act, and Pradel is a key member of the legal team that represents Transco in administrative proceedings similar to civil litigation. It's a company-wide, cross-functional effort that also requires approachability. Pradel works with the rates and regulatory commercial group to research other pipelines, prepare written testimony and negotiate the issues. "The best way to learn about a regulated business is to be part of the rate case," she says. "I like being involved in that side of the company, and working with all of our customers to settle into a rate structure that everyone can live with."

Pradel's open-door policy has made her successful at work, but has also involved her in her community. "If you have a group and you need volunteers, call me and ask, because chances are, I'll do it." She calls herself a joiner, and has become extensively involved in the Houston Young Lawyers Association, the Houston Bar Association, Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo, University of Houston alumni organizations and the Energy Bar Association. "I liked volunteering so I continued doing it," she says. "Then, you look up and go, 'Oh heck, I'm president of the young lawyers' group; how did that happen?' It started out from really enjoying the social happy hours."

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