

ADRIANNE MAZURA

Keeping Employers Anchored with Practical, Savvy Strategy

by A. Thomas

It was early 1970s, and Adrienne Mazura was like many fresh-faced college graduates. She needed a job. Characteristic of this Michigan native's litigation style, Mazura set into motion a strategy that would earn her a certificate, take her to two states, and land her a job within a few months.

Michigan, where she grew up and earned her undergraduate and J.D. degrees.

Mazura has established a reputation in the labor and employment law field as a practical, business-driven attorney who partners with clients to achieve their goals. Her dedication to understanding a company

the time in the world," Mazura says of her clients. "They have work to do. When you look at issues as problems that need to be solved, in general you will come to the right solution for the client."

Litigator and Advisor

Mazura practiced law at DLA Piper LLP (US) from 1990 to 2010 before moving to Quarles & Brady.

She describes herself as a navigator who assists employers through difficult issues and helps them avoid future ones. Playing a key role in helping clients find solutions to complicated, complex or sensitive problems, as well as trial work, attracted Mazura to representing management.

She relishes her roles as advocate and adviser and believes any lawyer who wants to be successful in this field of law must also.

"You have to like a mix of litigation and advising," Mazura says. "I like to do both, and I learn from both."

Mazura's client roster includes those from the transportation, manufacturing, financial, and telecommunications arenas. Among longtime clients are Telephone & Data Systems Inc. and its subsidiaries, including U.S. Cellular, for which Mazura is the primary labor counselor.

Deborah Friedman, legal affairs director for Telephone & Data Systems Inc., describes Mazura as a fully-committed attorney who brings feistiness, loyalty, and fierceness to representing clients. Mazura, she says, respects the in-house attorneys and parameters under which they have to work.

"One of my favorite things about Adrienne is her empathy for the role of the in-house attorney and the necessity of the in-house attorney to manage costs," says Friedman. "She is extra-sensitive to client costs, so toward that end, she very carefully reviews bills, self-adjust bills, uses lower-priced attorneys whenever possible for things that don't require her supervision, and doesn't double-bill if she wants to sit in on one of her colleagues."

Mazura is licensed to practice in Illinois and admitted to practice before the U.S. Court of Appeals, 6th Circuit and U.S. Court of Appeals, 7th Circuit. She has also advocated for clients before the National Labor Relations Board and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

But she also brings a depth of experience in



The results: Mazura completed a paralegal program in Philadelphia, then went to Chicago to work at a law firm. She worked as a litigation paralegal for a few years. But she was only six months on the job when Mazura no longer questioned whether she was smart enough to be a lawyer, too.

She knew she could do it. And, knew she had no choice—the law had hooked her.

"When you're destined to do something, you're destined to do something," says Mazura, a partner with **Quarles & Brady LLP**, where she represents employers in labor and employment law matters, handling, among other issues, class-action lawsuits.

Her tone in describing her career choice is as practical and matter-of-fact as her approach to litigation and serving her clients: "I knew this was the way I would be making a living."

A desire to live in a large city and start her independent life some distance away from immediate family were factors in Mazura's decision to practice law in Illinois rather than in

and its business strategy does not go unnoticed or underappreciated, points out Jeff Childs, executive vice president and chief human resources officer with U.S. Cellular, a longtime client.

And because she familiarizes herself with a company, she is always a tactful yet straightforward counselor.

"She will not hesitate to be extremely clear about the legal parameters and conditions involved in the case," says Childs. "When we are involved, she is first and foremost really clear with me" about the company's legal responsibilities.

"At the same time, she knows as a company, we hold ourselves to a legal standard and beyond what is legal. As a result, we get better decisions from working with Adrienne or someone from her team."

Truthfulness and candor are among the most-admired traits Mazura brings to her business relationships.

"I never make an assumption they have all

labor and employment law few lawyers can claim. When Mazura was admitted to the bar in the late 1970s, Title VII was relatively new and untested.

At that time, traditional employment and labor law—for instance, collective bargaining negotiations and union organizing campaigns—were part and parcel of the work handled by a new attorney. The number of people with that type and depth of experience are fewer today, notes Mazura, whose expertise covers all of those areas.

“Many employment lawyers have never been exposed to the traditional side” of labor and employment law, Mazura says. Quarles “represents employers in all those areas. You name it, this firm does it.”

Master and Mentor

Life as a lawyer was difficult when Mazura first started practicing law. Few women were lawyers, and thus the number of experienced female lawyers who could be role models was even smaller. To have a baby while practicing was perceived as a career-changer. Now, happily, it is not at all uncommon, says Mazura, who was the first person in her firm to have a baby.

“It wasn’t so easy to be a woman lawyer. But it is the life I chose,” says the mother of three sons.

Today, Mazura stands as a pioneer in the field and a highly respected mentor to many, including Sally J. McDonald, a counselor in the legal department of W.W. Grainger.

McDonald and Mazura worked together for 10 years at Rudnick and Wolfe LLP, now DLA Piper. McDonald, an associate at the time, worked on numerous cases from beginning to end with Mazura.

“She is the best mentor that you could ever want. She is a wonderful teacher. And I think she is really good about giving associates opportunities to grow in their practice areas,” says McDonald.

“For instance, in the trials we had, she certainly could have handled all the direct and cross-examinations, but she never did that. She gives associates opportunities to learn.”

Life as a lawyer remains demanding. Much of Mazura’s mornings are spent in court, primarily federal although sometimes state court. Telephone calls, meetings, drafting, and reviewing drafts can occupy much of her afternoons.

Most challenging nowadays are matters that arise daily and make practicing law more interesting.

“Employment laws keep expanding,” Mazura says.

Known for her sense of humor among colleagues and clients, she still finds time to relax and to bond, laugh, and commiserate with other women lawyers. Every couple of months,

Mazura joins Friedman and other colleagues who also work in downtown Chicago for dinner, socializing, and venting.

“It’s like a private club. When the group gets together, you can’t get a word in. It’s a fight to the finish,” says Friedman, who has known Mazura for at least 15 years. “You fight for one storyline. Everyone is telling a story at the same time.”

Cause Close to Her Heart

As proud as Mazura is of helping employers, she cites the help she provided several Illinois facilities serving the developmentally disabled in the 1980s as particularly rewarding. Using arguments that had never been raised before under the Administrative Procedure Act, Mazura won reprieves for several facilities, giving them time to improve their facilities and come in compliance with applicable regulations.

“I believe I prevented the people who lived in those facilities—the only homes they’d known for years—from being thrown on the street,” says Mazura.

Winning in court isn’t always as clear cut as the case against the government. Though the majority of the time she’s gone to trial, she has won.

Her last loss? She thinks between 10 to 15 years ago.

“If you go to trial, you have to be prepared and unafraid to lose,” says Mazura, whose work includes a great deal of counseling clients to avoid losses. “I’ve got good clients who listen. They understand that settling is not necessarily a loss. However, they and I also understand that some cases can’t be settled for all kinds of reasons.”

Kathleen Hughes, employment counsel with the Union Pacific Railroad, has worked with Mazura for more than 25 years and has hired her as outside counsel for Hughes’ previous and current employer.

Most of their cases, Hughes says, have gone to summary judgment or were settled. When or if the matters went to trial, Hughes’ didn’t worry. Mazura is a “bet-the-company lawyer,” Hughes says without hesitation.

“She is gifted intellectually. She is exceptionally gifted in dealing with business people and offering commonsense solutions,” Hughes says.

“If you have something you’re being sued about, Adrienne is a lawyer to bet the company on. She is one of the brightest lawyers I’ve ever met.” ■