

Some new partners now help lead their firms

By Scott Lauk

ANNA KIMBRELL joined Husch Blackwell out of law school in 2014. At some firms, she'd likely still be on the long slog toward partner.

But Kimbrell put that particular goal in the rearview mirror two years ago. Now she's taking on a higher responsibility as the leader of Energy & Natural Resources, one of the six business units into which Husch's practices areas are organized.

"We're trying to get to a place where it's not people at the end of their career that have the time and are able to juggle this," Kimbrell, who is based in Kansas City, said in an interview. "Building a [business unit] and being the leader of a large team — it should be people who are right in the ramp-up of their career. They're building a group, they're future-forward, they're there for a long time and committed to seeing that group grow and be what it can be."

Kimbrell's quick rise is unusual but not unique, either at Husch Blackwell or in the legal community at large. For some attorneys, making partner means getting on the lowest rung of firm leadership, with a long climb ahead. But for others, leadership has been decoupled from length of career.

"Make people leaders when they're ready," said Jacque Albus, another recently minted Husch partner who is set to lead its Financial Services & Capital Markets business unit. "It doesn't matter now many years

they've been here."

Kimbrell and Albus, who both became partners in 2020, were announced as business unit leaders in January and will officially take on their roles on March 1. In a statement, Husch executives touted them as among a number of newer partners or recent lateral hires now serving as leaders.

"Our firm seeks to elevate talented lawyers into key leadership roles, regardless of tenure or age," Husch Blackwell Chair Catherine Hanaway said. "We're fortunate to have a very talented group of newer partners who are ready and capable to help lead the firm."

Husch isn't alone in seeing potential in new partners. Armstrong Teasdale recently announced John Willard, part of the firm's 2021 class of partners, as the head of its Debt Finance practice.

Willard, who is based in St. Louis, will oversee a practice area of more than 60 attorneys in the United States and the United Kingdom who assist borrowers and lenders in complex domestic and international debt financing matters. He said he sees his role as "listening and facilitating" for a team that spans multiple time zones.

"I have no doubt that there are attorneys in my practice group that could serve this role just as well as me who are senior to me," Willard said. "The strength of this practice area

doesn't rest on the fact that I'm the leader; the strength of it rests on the fact that we have a phenomenal bench of world-class attorneys in this particular practice area."

He added that having such regular contact with his colleagues can only help his own banking and restructuring practice, which he will maintain alongside his leadership role.

"It's a perk, in my eyes," he said.

Similarly, Kimbrell will need to balance her energy practice with the needs of her 68-lawyer business unit, while Albus — currently the head of Husch's Private Wealth practice — will continue to serve clients while overseeing her 160-attorney unit. Husch's unusual business-unit structure mixes transactional and litigation practices into arrangements that broadly serve clients in a particular industry.

Albus describes herself as "kind of old-school but also new." She began as summer associate at Husch in 1998 but interrupted her legal career to serve as an FBI agent. She returned to the firm four years ago.

"It shows that you don't have to do this every day for your entire legal career in order to get to a leadership role," she said.