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THE AMERICAN LAWYER

After a Year on the Road, K&L Gates Leadership Duo Are Bullish About the Firm's Future

By Jon Campisi
July 6, 2026

What You Need to Know

- Stacy Ackermann and Rick Giovannelli are helping to oversee an Am Law 100 firm with more than 1,600 lawyers and 45 offices globally.
- This past year since they were elevated to their positions has been marked by successful lateral growth, increasing technology adoption and deployment and strong client demand in a number of industries.

Stacy Ackermann and Rick Giovannelli racked up a lot of air miles in the past year, as the K&L Gates leadership duo put a high prize on meeting with clients out in the field after being elevated to global managing partner and management committee co-chair, respectively, last summer.

Ackermann and Giovannelli, who entered their new roles in July 2025, spoke with Law.com about their tenures thus far, the challenges they've faced, and successes realized, over the past year, and future visions for an Am Law 50 firm with more than 1,600 lawyers and 45 global offices.

"We've been busy," Ackermann said in a joint interview alongside Giovannelli. "It's been a fantastic year."

Courtesy photos

Stacy G. Ackermann, left, and Rick Giovannelli, right, of K&L Gates.

Much of the past year has been spent connecting with clients, rallying the troops internally, and developing a strategic growth vision for the future of the firm.

Ackermann said the two kicked things off by engaging in a listening tour with both partners and clients, and by focusing on four key categories: client-centered growth, innovation, "strategic and proactive" lateral growth, and financial discipline and stability and "focusing on our strong balance sheet and continued investment to pursue the continued profitable growth of the law firm."

The two have put a strong emphasis on modernizing the law firm, including making investments in artificial intelligence technology and investing internally in other ways to draw in lawyers during a time where the war for talent doesn't seem like it's subsiding anytime soon.

Giovannelli said much time has also been spent connecting with other partners at the firm to try and build consensus on any desired changes or thoughts about direction of the firm.

"One of the challenges that we consistently see in a firm as big as ours is trying to build consensus," Giovannelli said. "We are a global firm with lawyers with a lot of different perspectives, but we operate in a truly integrated way as one firm."

In order to continue with that mindset, it's important for leadership to try to build at least a minimal level of consensus on matters, with the understanding that "you're never going to have an actual unanimous consensus about anything," he said.

When having conversations with partners about firm strategy and execution, Giovannelli said he has found that partners generally may not initially buy into a strategy, but putting an emphasis on consensus-building and democratic action and decision-making typically helps get folks on board with management goals.

"We are a professional services partnership," Giovannelli said. "Our people are our most important asset by far, and we need to engage with them and make sure that they feel good about the strategy and the actions that we're taking, and that requires a lot of building trust."

Giovannelli said because many of the firms lawyers already knew him and Ackermann, that trust-building went a bit smoother from the kickoff, and lent each of them some level of credibility.

"Overall, because we are both committed to moving the firm together as one firm, we generally have gotten buy-in, but it has required a fair amount of real conversation," he said.

During this past year, Ackermann said the firm changed internal processes and client-facing programs, specifically its key account program, which she said was a large priority from the get-go.

The latter identifies key clients "and the scaffolding and the resources to enable our relationship partners to execute on those growth plans."

"We've been rapidly expanding the number of clients that are involved in that program," Ackermann said.

The firm's lateral hiring has also changed during this past year, with the pair electing "go on the offensive and to be very intentional about strategic lateral hiring," according to Ackermann.

In addition to client travels, Giovannelli said he and Ackermann also spent a large amount of their time on airplanes to go visit lateral groups and headhunters, "and we're really starting to see that pay off."

The firm, Giovannelli said, has also streamlined practice operations, organizing in different ways internally "to try to get more of the right lawyers together in the right rooms, talking to each other in ways that there may have been some unintentional silos developed in the past."

K&L Gates, he said, continues to have a good mix of practices and continues to see increasing client demand in key industries and initiatives.

"We're really redoubling our industry efforts because that's how our clients see themselves and they want to know that lawyers truly understand their industries," Giovannelli said.

Of course, top of mind for many modern law firms is innovation, and K&L Gates is no different. Many clients over this past year have approached the firm for advice on their own AI strategies, as the firm itself continues to put a strong emphasis on tech adoption and changing with the times.

Giovannelli referenced its appointment this spring of Seattle-based partner Jake Bernstein as the firm's new global innovation partner. Bernstein—who also co-chairs the firm›s AI solutions group—will lead AI strategy, governance and innovation operations, which will include AI platform selection, workflow development and data and knowledge management.

Giovannelli said the firm is proud of its emphasis on technology, putting K&L Gates in the top 10% or so of law firms putting a higher prize on actual AI deployment.

"I think the conversation internally has moved from adoption to execution," he said. "We have a huge number of lawyers who are very, very active users of the AI technology and we are developing, and we have developed, very specific practice applications that are actually being used."

Looking ahead, Ackermann and Giovannelli are excited about what the future holds for K&L Gates, envisioning a time of growth and lots of changes, but specific plans and goals are always subject to change.

"It's as Yogi Berra said: it's hard to make predictions, especially about the future," Giovannelli said.

That said, one thing that doesn't appear to be in the immediate cards is any more office openings. While that could always change, Giovannelli said the need simply doesn't appear to be there at the moment, "but that could literally change tomorrow."

The firm continues to encourage attorneys to be in the office at least around three days per week, but the firm doesn't appear to have a hard-fast policy across all 45 locations.

In the U.S., Ackermann said most offices have a three-day-a-week office policy, but she admitted that can be challenging with a footprint spanning such a broad geographical region.

Giovannelli, meanwhile, concluded the firm is really starting to recoup the dividends from the investments it has made in lateral growth, continuing to see excitement around the partners who have joined and the "pipeline of lateral talent that we have."

"Our pipeline is stronger than it has been, certainly as far as I can remember, and we're excited to have many of those partners join us," Giovannelli said.