

# Nutter's Leaders Emphasize Efficiency, Getting Laterals 'Into the Fabric of the Firm'

Liam T. O'Connell and Michael E. Scott, co-managing partners, say, "We make a strong effort to quickly integrate laterals into the fabric of the firm. We can personally attest to the success of those efforts at integration, as we were both lateral partners to the firm."

By Lizzy McLellan

**Firm:** Nutter McClennen & Fish

**Firm Leader:** Liam T. O'Connell and Michael E. Scott, co-managing partners

**Head Count:** 150 lawyers and 150 staff

**Locations:** Boston; Hyannis, Massachusetts

**Practice Areas:** Mergers and acquisitions; banking law; tax; real estate development and finance; litigation and trial representation with emphasis on complex commercial litigation, representation of clients in government enforcement, intellectual property litigation, products liability litigation, and labor and employment counseling and litigation; intellectual property law; private client representation, including concierge wealth management and trusts and estates administration.

**Governance structure and compensation model:** The firm is managed by two co-managing partners



Liam O'Connell and Michael Scott, from Nutter.

and a seven-person Executive Committee. The Executive Committee is chaired by the co-managing partners. The Executive Committee is responsible for compensation.

**Do you offer alternative fee arrangements?** Yes. Nutter partners with clients to ensure the firm's and clients' collective interests are aligned with respect to objectives and value. The firm has entered

into fixed fee or hybrid arrangements with clients, with success fees aligned with achieving client objectives.

**What do you view as the two biggest opportunities for your firm, and what are the two biggest threats?**

We believe our model offers great opportunity for growth. Nutter practices on a national level—we

regularly practice in 48 of 50 states, and we act as national counsel to several of our clients. One-third of our largest 150 clients are based outside of New England. We represent five of the top 10 largest banks in the United States and more than 130 financial institutions nationwide. Last year, our revenue increased by 15%. Our approach to the delivery of legal services—disciplined focus on excellence in those areas where we practice and efficiency in the way we provide legal services—is valued by clients. We believe our model offers an attractive platform for lawyers to grow sophisticated national practices. Since 2018, nine partners, 10 of counsel, and 29 associates joined the firm. Those who have joined us laterally have benefited from our entrepreneurial culture in serving their clients and growing their practices. We think continued lateral growth to be one of the biggest opportunities.

Organic growth also continues to be a real opportunity for the firm. We continue to find that our clients value our approach—we deliberately focus on those areas of the law in which we practice at the highest level, and we do that work with a disciplined focus on excellence. We invest in our more junior lawyers and focus on efficiency in the delivery of our legal services. Our litigation partners have earned a stellar reputation for trial work—as an example, our litigators represented clients in

over 800 matters in 29 states and 5 different countries. Our real estate practice is an industry leader nationally. Last year, we handled \$5 billion of financial lending for lenders and borrowers; managed 85 commercial property acquisitions and dispositions totaling millions of square feet; and permitted 55 real estate developments. Our business law team represented corporate and private equity clients in 55 corporate and private equity mergers and acquisitions transactions, and handled 50 equity financings for emerging companies. Our Private Client Department is flourishing, and manages \$2.5 billion in trusts for clients and works with 6,600 estate planning clients across the nation. On the intellectual property front, our attorneys bring wide-ranging experience in many cutting edge technologies, as we have filed more than 1,100 new patents since 2017 for clients in areas such as 3D printing, artificial intelligence, and T-cell therapies.

Like all firms, the pace of technological change presents challenges for law firms. We have invested in this area to both ensure that our systems are best in class, and that we continually look for opportunities to apply technology to our delivery in legal services in a manner that maximizes the efficiencies those technologies might offer.

Our other challenge, although one we see being less a factor as our

reputation grows, is the age-old concern about whether mid-market firms can compete nationally for the most sophisticated work. Our reputation for excellence, the results we have achieved for our clients, and our national client base act as counters to the old narrative, but we are aware it exists still in some quarters.

**The legal market is so competitive now—what trends do you see, and has anything, including alternative service providers, altered your approach? Is your chief competition other mid-market firms, or is your firm competing against big firms for the same work?**

As we've noted, we've found that exceptional work continues to be valued by clients. If you can deliver exceptional work in an efficient and timely manner, then your services are in demand. While competition has increased with the introduction of new firms to new markets, the key to success remains a constant—excellence delivered efficiently. We compete with other exceptional legal service providers on a platform that allows us to deliver our services in a highly efficient manner. This approach has paid dividends, as our client roster has grown by an average of 350 new clients each year over the last three years.

**There is much debate around how law firms can foster the next generation of legal talent. What advantages and disadvantages**

**do midsize firms have in attracting and retaining young lawyers, particularly millennials?**

It is a challenging but exciting time to be a young lawyer. The practice continues to evolve, and we expect the coming years to offer the opportunity for significant innovation. We have found our firm, as a midsize firm, to be attractive to young lawyers. We invest in the training of our junior attorneys and as a midsize firm, offer our young lawyers significant responsibility and direct client contact at an early juncture in their careers. Internally, we offer an entrepreneurial and dynamic culture, and the opportunity for leadership at early stages of our lawyers' careers. Our collegial spirit and passion for practicing law at the highest levels has resulted in consistent top rankings in Vault's "Best Midsize Law Firms to Work For" survey and recognition for the second consecutive year in *The Boston Globe's* "Top Places to Work" list.

**Does your firm employ any non-lawyer professionals in high-level positions (e.g. COO, business development officer, chief strategy officer, etc.)? If so, why is it advantageous to have a nonlawyer in**

**that role? If not, have you considered hiring any?**

Yes, we do. We believe in excellence in the practice of law. We hire professionals with a specialized set of talents in non-legal roles, including financial management, information technology, marketing, and business development, to help us run the business and ensure that our firm conducts its business consistent with best in class principles.

**What would you say is the most innovative thing your firm has done recently, whether it be technology advancements, internal operations, how you work with clients, etc.?**

Our job is to create an organization of highly functioning professionals in a culture that strives for excellence in all that we do. Our business is based on our talent, and we are always looking to ensure that our partners and junior attorneys are the best that they can be. Last year we completed a 360 assessment of our talent management programs and worked with a consultant to ensure that we have the very best training and mentoring programs in place for our junior attorneys and other professionals. We also adopted the Diversity Lab's Mansfield Rule as part of the firm's

commitment to consider a broad and diverse pool of candidates for significant leadership roles.

**Does your firm have a succession plan in place? If so, what challenges do you face in trying to execute that plan? If you don't currently have a plan, is it an issue your firm is thinking about?**

Our firm recently experienced a transition as we assumed our roles as co-managing partners on July 1, 2019. As a firm, we are committed to offering leadership opportunities to younger attorneys, and many of our next generation of law firm leaders presently serve in internal leadership roles, including as department chairs or co-chairs, and as members of our Executive Committee. We also encourage lateral partners to take on leadership roles, and we make a strong effort to quickly integrate laterals into the fabric of the firm. We can personally attest to the success of those efforts at integration, as we were both lateral partners to the firm.

*Lizzy McLellan writes about the Pennsylvania legal community and the business of law at firms of all sizes. Contact her at [lmclellan@alm.com](mailto:lmclellan@alm.com). On Twitter: [@LizzyMcLell](https://twitter.com/LizzyMcLell)*

