This month, Lawyer Monthly’s An Interview With feature speaks to Joyce Mazero from Perkins Coie in Dallas, Texas. We look at Joyce’s work, the challenges that arise and what motivated her to enter the world of law.

You have been practising corporate law for around 30 years I believe, how much has this environment altered over that time? Is your work more or less enjoyable now?

Technology and its facilitating of a continuing building culture of speed, competition and many times, acceptance of less than high-quality work by clients, has continued to shape the environment in which we serve clients. No doubt that practicing law, especially in Big Law, is difficult. About 20 years ago I made a few decisions: 1) that I would always have a practice I uniquely developed and maintain it independently so I controlled the quality of services provided and my own destiny; and 2) that I would adopt a workstyle that made it possible for me to have a family, maintain close and involved relationships with my family; and grow my practice. To do that, I decided that travel and client time took me away from the office anyway, so I fashioned a work schedule that allowed me to build a large practice but work at the times and at the places that made the most sense for me. While it has not always been appreciated by Big Law, the positive affect of my approach on me, my family, and my practice is self-evident.

You have extensive experience working with national and global clients in the areas of franchising, licensing, distribution, manufacturing, logistics, buying groups, cooperatives and shared services systems. Which one throws up the biggest challenges?

I enjoy the entire world of issues that abound in getting products to market including product design, licensing, sourcing, commodities, manufacturing, inventory management, transportation, financing and liability issues. Most are big dollar deals and many present interesting cross-border complexities. The businesspeople are genuinely experts from whom I learn much. That aside, for decades many companies have adhered to an industry view that contracts for supply chain deals are best addressed in “business-speak” with little tolerance for treatment of material legal issues that can easily affect monetary, reputational and brand value. Because of the tendency to favor speed and less paper, I work hard to focus the business people’s attention on the key deal issues in a pre-deal concise outline and conduct training programs on how they can obtain data and help analyze these issues in advance so we can keep the pace fast, but at the same time, smart.

How do you navigate these challenges in an effective way?

I have been blessed to have served as a general counsel for a consumer goods company at the beginning of my career and to have worked side by side with businesspeople thereafter throughout my career. This includes the female leaders in the Women’s Foodservice Forum from whom I learned so much about decision-making protocols including how to credibly take into consideration the legitimacy of my bases and assumptions and the potential biases underlying them as well as how to concisely present plans for resolving problems with the support of a business case and strategy. By approaching the resolution of legal problems in the same fashion, I found I met the businesspeople on a common playing field and it was clear we were on the same team.

You have been highly ranked several times in Chambers USA; to what do you attribute this?

Those that know me know I put my relationships with my clients and their expectations for my services first. It is important to me that they can tangibly assess the value I bring to each matter they have brought to me. By consistently living by my goal of being a value-add to each client, I think clients reciprocate by providing third parties information leading to high-quality rankings.

What motivated you to enter the legal profession? Why did you choose your areas of specialization?

It was more than 35 years ago, and not a very impressive reason. I was planning on taking the foreign service exam and got distracted by my cousin’s decision to go to law school and decided to just follow him. It turned out he did not go to law school, but by then I was in school and invested.

As to my focused area of practice, another cousin who owned a retail chain advised me to make sure I chose an area of practice that allowed me to visibly distinguish my skills and abilities from other lawyers so that potential clients would have a short list to choose from and it would be feasible for me to continually strive to be at the top of that list. Franchising and distribution law initially provided that opportunity early on in my career and later expanding my distribution practice more broadly to include international supply chain projects that support franchisors and non-franchisors really gave my practice added lift.

Professionally, what would you say is your biggest achievement?

My values underpinning my practice have not changed. My need to be a value-add to anything I do for a client continues to drive me even after 35 years. I am proud to be energized by that motivating force and know it is truly a reflection of who I am. I am also proud that my clients see that in me and that my children who are now targeting the law as a part of their potential future careers see that too.

What would you still like to achieve from your career?

I would like to leave my practice to my team knowing that the values I established will continue.