

Peggy Otum

PARTNER; CO-CHAIR, ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT,
AND NATURAL RESOURCES PRACTICES



Education: JD, Howard University School of Law; BSc, psychology, University of Toronto

Company Name: WilmerHale

Industry: Law

Company CEO: Susan Murley and Robert Novick, Co-Managing Partners

Company Headquarters Location: Boston, Massachusetts & Washington, DC

Number of Employees: 1,931

Your Location (if different from above): San Francisco, California

Words you live by: "Finish each day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day. You shall begin it serenely and with too high a spirit to be encumbered with your old nonsense." – Ralph Waldo Emerson

Personal Philosophy: "Always do what you are afraid to do." – Ralph Waldo Emerson

What book are you reading: *A New Earth* by Eckhart Tolle

What was your first job: Office receptionist for a marketing company

Favorite charity: Welcome Home Children Orphanage in Haiti

Interests: Spending time with my family, quiet time outdoors, and cooking traditional Nigerian and Haitian meals

Family: My incredible husband, Andrew, who is in-house counsel for Google, and my two extraordinary daughters, Claire (12) and Chloe (8)



Leading at a Historic Moment

I joined WilmerHale's San Francisco office, and became the Co-Chair of the Firm's Energy, Environment, and Natural Resources practice, a mere four months before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns began. Although I had met all of my team members in person before the lockdown, those relationships were still very new. Like many other law firm leaders, the pandemic has caused me to reflect on my own leadership style and to adapt to the virtual setting in which we found ourselves interacting with our colleagues.

Over the course of the pandemic, I have found that the leadership qualities that were important before we went into lockdown have been the same qualities that have helped my team weather these trying times. Communicating thoughtfully has been chief among them. Clear and honest conversations have been so important over the course of the year. They have helped us avoid misunderstandings and build trust in each other. Open communication has also accelerated my understanding of the different working styles on my team. Without a concerted effort to get to know each team member on a personal level, this learning curve would have been a lot flatter.

The pandemic has also provided opportunities to extend trust to team members who stepped up to take on more responsibility on urgent client matters. We were able to find ways to efficiently integrate team members from across the country and provide support and empowerment to each of them, allowing them to expertly assist our clients in navigating difficult and novel legal issues.

Leading teams and clients through a crisis like COVID-19 also demanded faster decision-making and a rapid embrace of change. Paying greater attention to how my team and clients were taking care of themselves, and leading on that front by improving my own sleep and exercise habits, helped us maintain the balance needed to perform at a high level over a sustained period of time, while juggling even more family and other commitments than any of us are accustomed to handling.

I feel truly privileged to have had the ability to work through the pandemic, surrounded (at least virtually) by terrific colleagues and clients. I am committed to carrying forward the leadership values that have helped us through this historic moment in time.