

Five questions



Eve Wright Taylor

Vice president and associate general counsel, Miami Heat and the American Airlines Arena

Eve Wright Taylor is vice president and associate general counsel for the Miami Heat basketball team and the American Airlines Arena. Her experience ranges from corporate law to the Ladies Professional Golf Association. She advises on a variety of legal issues pertaining to concerts and events, marketing and promotions, corporate sales, merchandising initiatives and player-related matters. In March 2012, she was the proud recipient of a *Sports Business Journal* Forty Under 40 Award. Here she talks to deputy editor Aarti Maharaj about the challenges of governance in the field of sports.

1 What is the biggest regulatory challenge for an organization like yours, and how do you approach it?

Many aspects of the business are regulated - even things that may not be readily apparent. They are the same types of regulations you will encounter in some other businesses, but the application may be a bit different due to the nature of the team and the arena.

Like any other business, we must comply with federal and Florida state laws, as well as the City of Miami and Miami-Dade County ordinances and regulations imposed by federal agencies. Those laws affect how we facilitate sweepstakes and contests, how we manage the arena facility and operate

events, and how we interact with and provide support services for arena attendees.

As the Miami Heat is privately held, regulations such as Dodd-Frank or Sarbanes-Oxley do not necessarily affect us - but that doesn't mean we aren't prepared to handle their provisions.

2 What are some of the trials and tribulations you have faced while moving into the boardroom?

I am passionate about board service and am always looking for ways to contribute in that setting. My sense is that the challenges represented by working in corporate America extend to board service as well. I have dealt with being isolated

because I'm the only woman in the room. I've dealt with everything from condescension and dismissiveness to having serious questions about the fiscal management of an organization. Those haven't been my experiences every time, but they represented a challenge whenever they *did* occur.

In terms of interpersonal relationships, sometimes those challenges were just the result of being the new kid on the block, but occasionally they were due to bullying or an attention grab.

Just as you would in life generally, I learned how to manage personalities in a way that productively facilitated the business of the board, and that always meant dedicating more time to relationship

building and management. I usually worked on those relationships outside of actual board meetings and was purposeful in my engagement with my fellow directors.

3 As a female associate general counsel, how do you navigate through a traditionally male-dominated sports industry?

There are many phenomenal women who work in this field and have managed to successfully crack through the glass ceiling, but there's still a significant amount of work to be done.

From a diversity standpoint, I have to give credit where it's due. Basketball, from the business side, is increasingly more diverse, and the Miami Heat and the AmericanAirlines Arena are among the most diverse organizations in our industry, as women and ethnic minorities hold positions from entry level through to executive staff. As a whole, however, the business side of the sports industry is still pretty homogeneous, and sexism does persist.

In terms of navigating through a male-dominated industry, it starts with perspective for me. I am fortunate to live and work in a time in which I am able to stand on the shoulders of those women and minorities who sacrificed life and limb for each of us to have an equal opportunity to succeed.

And while not all of the 'isms' (sexism, racism, and so on) have been eradicated, navigating those circumstances is about how I choose to respond; I can either be discouraged and allow the situation to stop me before I get started, or I can honor this incredible opportunity and rich legacy of success left

to me by succeeding in spite of those who try to stop me. I feel indebted to both the leaders and the nameless people in the trenches of those movements for their sacrifice, and am obliged to protect that legacy by succeeding and by holding the door open for others.

So, when I encounter the 'isms', I do a few things. First, I seek counsel with a small group of people I trust to keep me objective and focused on the forest rather than mired in the weeds. Second, I learn the dynamics of the environment: who my allies are, what's the culture, what tools are available to insulate and protect myself, and so on. Last, but certainly not least, I blow the doors off the task or objective and do whatever it takes to make things happen.

4 What are some common misperceptions about your job, and what tips can you offer to those considering a career in the business of sports?

Many interns and young professionals assume that, as vice president and associate general counsel, part of my job consists of me hanging out and having close personal friendships with players.

While my mom, husband and friends usually think I'm super-cool, I wasn't hired to hang out, and the words 'groupie' or 'entourage member' aren't anywhere in my job description. Everyone has a role to play, and mine is facilitating the business of the organization.

In terms of breaking into the sports industry, I would recommend first figuring out what you like to do as opposed to what sounds cool. If you hate where you go every day, it's tough to like your

job or to meaningfully develop your career – no matter how great it might sound to other people.

At the Miami Heat and the arena we have job functions that you'd assume we'd have – like sales and service people, marketing folks and event co-ordinators – but we also have some that you may not ordinarily think about, such as risk managers, electricians and data researchers. All these folks became subject matter experts, and from there they were able to apply that expertise in the sports industry.

5 How have you managed to improve the reputation of the team?

The team and the arena both had an excellent reputation long before I arrived, almost six years ago now. That reputation is rooted in the vision and commitment of the team ownership and the community, and it is cultivated by a very progressive, nimble and extraordinarily talented executive team. I help to maintain and continue to cultivate the reputation of the team and the arena by being a good steward of it, both inside the organization and out.

At its essence, our reputation hinges on us providing a phenomenal experience by doing everything exceptionally well – and collectively we work very diligently to maintain that image.

So how does this play out? For me, it's more than technical expertise. It's more about being a reasonable, accessible and congenial legal colleague, both internally and externally, being an ambassador in the community, and doing what I can to further the exceptional experience we provide here at the AmericanAirlines Arena. 