



Eileen McMahon

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TORONTO

EILEEN MCMAHON, Partner at Torys LLP and the Chair of its Intellectual Property (IP) and Food and Drug Regulatory practices, is Canada's foremost lawyer in the life sciences. When she first started practicing law in 1987, McMahon sought an area of specialty that would let her draw on her Bachelor's in Chemistry and Biochemistry, and got her start by working with early Canadian biotechs in the IP and drug regulatory area.

McMahon attributes her involvement and success in the life sciences to the Pharma industry clients she says she's been fortunate to work with. "The reason [Pharma] is so rewarding for me is that you are working on the latest and greatest in terms of innovation," she says. "Pharma should be the darling of the world right now, because of the incredible inroads its made with vaccines and ability to bring innovative products to the market so quickly. I've been honoured to have been involved with this industry."

Although McMahon started in IP, she says the role has evolved into an advisory one for executives and in-house counsel within Pharma. Today, she takes pride in the strong trust she's built with her clients. "Generally speaking, no one wants to talk to a lawyer," she says. "Clients reach out when their backs are against the wall, and they know what they say to you will be held in strict confidence. The fact that they can confide in us and express their worries about a particular issue . . . I'm so fortunate that they can call me in those kinds of situations."

While helping clients was McMahon's inspiration, it was her family's support that empowered her to reach even higher in her career. "How many men are really comfortable with a spouse who's a high-powered executive, who works long hours, and can't always help on the home front because of client expectations?" she asks. "The fact that I have a husband who is so secure, so supportive, and kids who recognize they have a mom who's a working mom, [has taken me] really far."

As a child of immigrants, McMahon was encouraged to strive from an early age. "My mom in particular, who died when I was 18, gave me the best gift you could ask for," she says. "She convinced me I could do anything. I had three brothers, and she would say to me, 'You can do anything your brothers do—if not better.'" McMahon says her mother endowed her with a "fearless ambition" that continues to drive her forward.

Resilience is both McMahon's motto and what keeps her going. "We all have bad days, where you go home with your tail tucked between your legs, and you're thinking, 'Can I do anything right?' But it makes you resilient, you dust yourself off, you learn from it, you become better, and your family still loves you and your friends still love you."

"I was told early in my career, 'You'll never make it on Bay Street.' Well, how wrong was the person who told me that?"