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LEADING

by Example

Cathleen Kelly Rebar, an attorney and partner in the law firm **Rebar Kelly**, has devoted her life to inspiring others, solving problems, and strengthening the community she calls home.

ASK CATHLEEN REBAR TO DESCRIBE WHAT SHE DOES FOR A LIVING, AND SHE WILL LIKELY SAY, "I'M AN ATTORNEY!" While this is technically accurate, her role may be best described by the immense value she provides.

"I'm a professional problem solver," she says. "There are plenty of people in the world who like to identify problems, but the people who are good at solving problems are much harder to find. When there are no bumps in the road, everybody is a good driver. When there's a crisis, the talented people rise above. It could be something as simple as a problem in

the kitchen. If the refrigerator has a leak, don't just drop the problem in my lap; tell me you have contacted someone to come fix it."

As an example, consider the firm's response to COVID-19 and the unprecedented challenges that followed. While many companies closed their doors and furloughed employees in the midst of the pandemic, Rebar Kelly—the law firm headed by Rebar and fellow attorney Chris Kelly—"didn't have a hiccup," she says. In fact, Rebar Kelly opened two new offices, expanding the firm's footprint to Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Ohio.

"Everything comes down to preparation," she adds. "When we're writing up our client reports, we prepare people for the best, worst, and most likely scenarios. That's how we handle everything we do."



My goal is to become invaluable to people, and everyone at our firm strives for the same.”

She cites a recent late-night phone call from one of her attorneys. When the phone rang, Rebar felt a sense of dread because she rarely received unexpected phone calls from this individual. The attorney had called to inform Rebar that the firm had not been properly informed of a quickly approaching deadline for a specific case. Furthermore, the attorney wanted Rebar to know she would send the necessary paperwork for Rebar to review early the following morning so they could address the issue with time to spare—problem solved.

“She was basically calling to tell me, ‘There’s a problem, but I have a solution,’ and it was a great solution,” Rebar says. “She had it under control, and that’s why she’s invaluable. We look for people like her when we’re bringing on new hires, and we also do a lot of training to focus on preparation and adaptability. Both are essential skills in the courtroom.”

Eager to Help

Rebar was recently named a Super Lawyer for the eighth consecutive year, and her firm was named Woman-Owned Law Firm of the Year by New World Report. Accolades aside, she considers service to the community among her life’s greatest achievements. During the pandemic, Rebar Kelly created a philanthropic endeavor known as “Local Families Helping Local Businesses Helping Local Families,” in which they collected gift cards from nearby businesses to support families in need. In addition, the firm participated in various community food drives and other endeavors to support those who were hurting during a difficult time.

Rebar has made efforts to improve the community in a much more personal way. Since 2009, she has served the residents of western Montgomery County as a Magisterial District Judge. She is up for reelection later this year, and she looks forward to completing another six-year term.

As a judge, Rebar sees it as her responsibility to understand the perspectives of all stakeholders. It’s one of the reasons she attends community meetings such as those organized



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Rebar credits the people who have supported her and sacrificed so much to help her excel. This includes her family as well as Chris Kelly (left), her fellow partner in Rebar Kelly.

by the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force, which serves the Methacton community. If constituents are passionate about an issue that affects the community, she wants to know about it.

“I will always listen to another side and another position before I formulate my own judgment,” she says. “Sometimes people will be talking about a certain issue, and I won’t fully understand it or I may think their approach is more extreme than mine, but that doesn’t mean it’s wrong. It’s important for me to keep an open mind.”

She takes the same mentality to the bench. In her mind, the phrase “one size fits all” does not apply. Much like her work with her own firm, she constantly looks for solutions to problems.

“I see a lot of cases that are of a fairly minor nature, where someone has gotten into trouble for one reason or another,” she says. “Not every person grows up equally. Not everyone has the same skill set as my son, who I hold to a high standard because he grew up with an understanding of accountability. So, I ask, ‘What’s the solution for the person who is standing in front of me?’ They may be standing there because of a lack of resources, addiction or a mental health issue, or a character issue. If someone knows where their next meal is coming from,

will that solve the problem? That said, not every case is appropriate for problem solving. Sometimes you just have to apply the law.”

Rebar feels immense gratitude for the opportunities she has had to learn from and be mentored by “some truly great people.” In turn, she has led, mentored, and given back to others throughout her life—as a captain and a teammate in collegiate athletics, as an advocate for her clients, as a partner and a leader in her law firm, and as someone with a passion for strengthening the community she calls home. She credits the people who have supported her and sacrificed so much to help her excel, including her husband, Michael, and their 16-year-old son, Michael III, as well as Chris Kelly, her fellow partner in Rebar Kelly.

Going forward, Rebar has no “grand plans” for her future. She admits she’s in unfamiliar territory in that regard, but she’s confident about one thing: There’s always room to improve.

“For the first time in my life, I don’t have a defined ‘higher step’ in mind,” she says. “My goal is to constantly reevaluate and work on becoming the best person I can be—a better leader, a better mentor, a better attorney, and a better judge. I’m always trying to find new ways to give back, to strengthen the firm, to inspire other women, and to see how I can improve the work-life balance. Other than that, I will look at new opportunities as they come.” ■

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