

blog post | 12 October 2017

## Breaking the mould: Sadie Baron, Global CMO, Reed Smith

The experience of Sadie Baron, CMO at Reed Smith, is a powerful lesson in how to achieve career success. But she is also a showcase for a fast modernising legal profession and its approach to leadership.

### The environment to flourish



Sadie Baron

Global CMO

Reed Smith

Business services functions in UK law firms have evolved massively in recent years. This has transformed the legal business, but it is also striking how it has meant that business services leaders from UK firms are now in high demand all over the globe.

Take Global firm Reed Smith for example. Three of its 'Chief' roles are now taken by Brits: Sadie Baron, the firm's Global Chief Marketing Officer (CMO), Lucy Dillon, Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO), both of whom operate out of London, and Phil Page who moved from London to Pittsburgh to be Chief of Office Services.

Baron agrees that the sophistication of UK business services teams has a strong allure beyond our borders. 'There's a lot to be gained by taking on our experience,' she says. 'The war for talent in London is huge. We're recruiting all over the world and of course we have to work hard to get the right people, but in London the competition is like nothing else.'

But perhaps there is something about Reed Smith too ? a willingness to think differently, to go that bit further, to find the right blend of skills and approach that can deliver business growth. And Sadie Baron is the role model for this more progressive attitude, one that is becoming more common in law today.

## **The path to leadership**

For a start, Baron doesn't come across as a typical C-suite executive, boasting a host of academic qualifications and a relentless drive for the top. Not that she hasn't sought success in her career, and she admits that she's rarely daunted by challenges. But her tale is chiefly one of being open to possibilities and embracing the positives that come with a life that doesn't always follow a strict plan.

This approach started young. She didn't know what she wanted to do when she left school, so she deferred a place at the University of Bristol, in the meantime taking up a junior role at what was then Norwich Union in their PR and Publicity Department. She never looked back. 'When I told my Father I wouldn't be going to university, he really wasn't happy with me,' she says. 'But it was one of the best decisions I've ever taken because I spent the next eight years learning my craft.'

She worked in every department including recruitment, advertising and PR, publishing and design, and ended up as Accounts Manager for all Norwich Union events for the senior management team. She then unexpectedly became pregnant, took voluntary redundancy and became a stay-at-home mum. Life, however, had other ideas.

Eight months into motherhood, the Chief Executive of Norwich Union called to ask when Baron would be back. 'I had to explain that I wouldn't be returning, that I'd left! But I agreed I'd freelance for them, working on their events from home,' she says. That led to her partnering with The Production Bureau running a freelance events management business, and over three years getting to know clients very well. One of them happened to be Eversheds.

'A full-time job came up at Eversheds and I was lucky enough to get it,' she explains. 'Then starts my journey into law.' She says she didn't know what she was joining at the time but her willingness to take a chance led to a 14-year stint with the firm, by the end of which she was its Head of International Marketing.

And she learnt a lot through the various roles she held at the firm: she rolled out the CRM system, and got involved in data which she didn't think she'd like, but loved. She looked after the corporate, commercial and real estate practices and the London office. But her success also taught her a major lesson that she has taken into her own attitude to recruitment. 'You don't have to love law, or have a burning passion for it. It's about the right attitude. I will take people from FMCG or any sector if they can demonstrate a love for marketing and BD, not necessarily the sector. I can train the other stuff, but I can't train attitude.'

She's also learnt some other key lessons along the way. After Eversheds, for instance, she spent a short time with PwC in the forensics department. This wasn't a promotion ? the friendly partners and the powerful brand won her over (and the opportunity to get some broader experience of professional services). But it was an important step to gain the right tools for longer term success. 'Don't be afraid of making sideways moves. I am CMO because of this, because I genuinely have BD and marketing [skills], and CRM and I understand data, and so on. I'm well versed to make decisions and understand the dynamics of what goes on and what's needed,' she says.

## **Game of chance?**

But if Sadie Baron has taken the right steps to succeed in law, she also frequently mentions her huge luck, how blessed she is and how, in the context of Reed Smith, the 'stars aligned' the day she entered the office. 'I walked in for the interview and I thought I really want to work here,' she says. 'And I hadn't ever really felt that before. I felt drawn to it.'

She describes Reed Smith as an outstanding legal firm that has gravitas. 'The people, opportunity, location, clients' it felt like I was going to be joining something really exciting and high quality and I just loved the people, I still do. When they called to offer me the job, I almost cried, I was so happy.' Even now, she says she still pinches herself because she can't quite believe that she's the firm's CMO.

It feels like talking to someone who won the lottery. But while luck plays a part in anyone's life success, if Baron was earmarked for leadership, it's surely because she is phenomenally good at stepping up and getting things done. For instance, she joined Reed Smith in 2013 as Director for Marketing, EMEA. Before long she was taking a second job on too - that of Director of the BD function for the Business and Finance business, a time she calls her 'two-job career'. When she became CMO in September 2016, just three years later, it was no doubt the logical culmination of her huge input over the previous three years - and an attitude that she describes as 'nothing ventured nothing gained'.

She is now passing on the lessons of her journey to her own team. In particular, she rails against the trend of specialising too soon: 'People get pigeon holed too early. I look at marketers in the early years of their career and all they do is BD'. She is currently setting up a marketing solutions team, which will improve firm-wide marketing efficiency, but it also reflects this career development ethos as it will offer people entry level marketing roles to manage mission critical, administrative tasks. 'It comes from where I started, giving people the ability to spend the early years learning the craft,' she says. 'And then, hopefully I can recruit them into other parts of the business. Otherwise how do they get the broad experience they need to get onto the right path?'

Perhaps what is most striking about Sadie Baron is just how personable she is. You can see why those in her team would trust her - this balance of huge capability with the humility that comes from knowing you've been given some great chances in life. It makes her accessible and easy to talk to - she's on your level.

We are drilled in the idea that we have control over our destiny, that we can fulfil our dreams if only we focus hard enough. But Sadie Baron is a timely reminder that while the potential may come from within, the real differentiator might be the ability to make the most of the unexpected opportunities and challenges that life throws at us.

At a time when law firms are equally facing the challenges of often surprising change, perhaps that is the quality Reed Smith liked too.

## **Career tips from Sadie Baron**

1. The only people who should ever give you negative feedback is your parents. Everyone else should look for the positives and work on developing them
2. If you don't believe in yourself, how can you expect others to?
3. Understand the firm you're working for (traditional or modern thinking) and how that will impact what you can achieve in your role.
4. Be true to yourself, be honest and ensure that every day you're in the job it takes you closer to being the person you want to be.
5. Try to be honest with everyone and treat people as you would want to be treated.

6. Don't be afraid of taking a break, going off and doing something different for a while.
7. And for Managing Partners/CEOs? Understand the power of working alongside your CMO.

Share this page:

- [Twitter](#) [1]
- [Linkedin](#) [2]
- [Facebook](#) [3]

[Top](#)

- [Privacy and Cookies](#)
- [Refer a Friend](#)
- [Sitemap](#)

---

**Source URL:** <https://www.totumpartners.com/insights/breaking-mould-sadie-baron-global-cmo-reed-smith>

#### **Links**

[1] <https://twitter.com/home?status=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.totumpartners.com%2Fprintpdf%2F1350>

[2]

<https://www.linkedin.com/shareArticle?mini=true&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.totumpartners.com%2Fprintpdf%2F1350>

[3]

<https://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.totumpartners.com%2Fprintpdf%2F1350>