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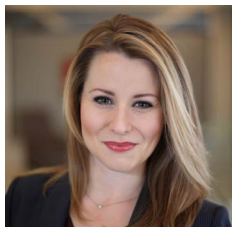
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Emily Cantwell

Building Community
Through Thoughtful,
Lasting Leadership

The Leader She Was Always Becoming: Emily Cantwell's Commitment to St. Louis



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If you had asked Emily Cantwell (née Kiser) and me during law school where we expected to be twenty years later, we would have confidently told you that one of us would still be practicing in a law firm and the other would have gone in-house.

That was the plan.

It was a perfectly logical arrangement between two aspiring lawyers who spent countless hours together at Saint Louis University School of Law—serving on the Saint Louis University Law Journal, campaigning (albeit, unsuccessfully) for student government, and organizing far more social gatherings than were probably advisable during law school. Like many plans made in your twenties, ours did not unfold exactly as expected.

Instead, both of us remained in private practice. And somehow, both of us became the leaders of our respective law firm offices.

Neither of us saw that coming. Then again, anyone who knew Emily in law school might disagree.

What I certainly did not anticipate was how much richer our friendship would become as we navigated similar leadership paths as female lawyers. The conversations that once centered on classes, on-campus interviews, and first-year associate life have evolved into discussions about firm strategy, client service, talent development, culture, and the challenge of balancing professional responsibilities with personal commitments.

Throughout those years, Emily has remained remarkably who she was when I first met her in Christine Rollins's 1L legal research & writing class—a deeply thoughtful, exceptionally capable, and genuinely generous person who makes the people around better.

Those qualities help explain why Emily has become such a respected leader in both her law firm, as well as in the St. Louis legal community, including her service as Chair of the Women in the Legal Profession (WILP) Section of the Bar Association of Metropolitan St. Louis (BAMSL). Her leadership reflects a career defined not only by professional excellence, but by a commitment to elevating others.



“What has impressed me most is not Emily’s resume, although it is undeniably impressive. It is the consistency of her character.”

“Emily Cantwell’s career demonstrates that leadership is not simply about titles or accomplishments. It is about creating opportunities for others, strengthening institutions, and leaving people and communities better than you found them.”

Building a Career While Building Community

Emily’s professional accomplishments are extensive.

She maintains an active litigation and trial practice while simultaneously serving in firm leadership. Emily leads her office as Partner in Charge, serves on her firm’s Executive Board, and remains deeply engaged in client work. Anyone who has managed a demanding litigation docket knows that alone constitutes more than a full-time job. Emily somehow does all of that while remaining actively involved in BAMSL, numerous civic organizations, and, most importantly, spending time with her supportive family: Rob and Keegan, Keely, and Grace.

What makes Emily particularly effective is that she approaches leadership the same way she approaches the practice of law: she listens carefully, builds relationships, and focuses on long-term results rather than short-term recognition. Emily is a natural athlete, but more importantly, she has always played the long game.

Those traits have made her a natural fit for BAMSL and especially for the Women in the Legal Profession Section.

Throughout her career, Emily has understood that professional organizations are most valuable when they create genuine connections and opportunities for future leaders. At least dating back to law school, Emily was a champion for Girls on the Run, supporting the next generation of women using the power of play.

Even then, Emily had a gift for building community. A devoted University of Florida alumna, she regularly welcomed her Gainesville friends into our law school circle whenever they visited St. Louis, effortlessly bringing together different groups

of people and forming lasting connections. That instinct for connecting others has become a hallmark of her leadership.

Under Emily’s leadership, the WILP Section continues to emphasize both professional development and personal wellbeing. Programs planned for this year include wellness-focused gatherings, engagement with law students at Saint Louis University School of Law, opportunities for community service, and initiatives designed to build connections among women lawyers at every stage of practice.

For Emily, these efforts are not simply events on a calendar. They reflect something she believes deeply: the legal profession must continue evolving to meet the needs of current and future generations of lawyers. That evolution requires dedicated leadership.

She has consistently focused on supporting emerging leaders and creating opportunities for women attorneys to develop networks, expand their skills, and find their own voices in the profession. In doing so, she has had a meaningful impact on countless lawyers who may never fully realize how much her encouragement or guidance influenced their careers. My own career, very much included.

Giving Back to Saint Louis University School of Law

One of the constants throughout Emily’s career has been her enduring connection to Saint Louis University School of Law.

While many alumni remain fond of their law school experience, Emily has gone much further than that. She has maintained deep and meaningful relationships with the institution, its faculty, and its students, viewing that connection as both a privilege and a responsibility.

When asked why she remains so engaged, Emily's answer is characteristically to the point. "My life wouldn't be what it is without the education I received at SLU Law."

Emily has translated that sense of gratitude into service. Whether mentoring students, supporting alumni initiatives, speaking with aspiring lawyers, or helping strengthen the bridge between law school and practice, Emily has consistently invested her time and energy in the next generation. Among other things, Emily has initiated a broader coordinated effort among St. Louis firms to support SLU Law's Public Interest Law Group (PILG) through fundraising.

In many ways, this commitment reflects one of Emily's defining beliefs: that professional success creates an obligation to help others succeed as well.

Those of us who know Emily are not surprised by that perspective. She has always been the person willing to answer the call, make the introduction, or spend an hour helping someone think through a challenge. She did it in law school, she does it in practice, and she continues to do it as a leader. If integrity is measured by consistency between words and actions, Emily embodies it.

Preserving History While Shaping the Future

Among her many professional and civic commitments, Emily often points to her service as a Trustee of the Missouri Historical Society as one of the most meaningful aspects of her work.

That passion stems from her vision of what the institution represents for the greater St. Louis region.

For Emily, the Missouri Historical Society is far more than a steward of artifacts and historical records. It is a platform that helps St. Louis understand and support itself.

As she sees it, the organization serves as a reminder of "who we are and how great of a city we are, and can be."

That perspective captures something essential about Emily's leadership style. She believes that strong communities are built when people understand their shared history, celebrate their achievements, and remain optimistic about their future.

Her commitment to civic engagement reflects a broader dedication to St. Louis—a city she has consistently worked to strengthen through her professional, educational, and community leadership roles.

It is not difficult to see the connection between Emily's civic and professional work. Whether she is mentoring lawyers, supporting students, or serving as a trustee, her focus is the same: preserving institutions while ensuring they remain strong enough to serve future generations.

Friendship, Leadership, and Looking Ahead

One of the privileges of writing this article is the opportunity to reflect on a friendship that has spanned law school, legal practice, and now law firm leadership.

The years have certainly brought surprises. Our carefully constructed plan that one of us would go in-house while the other stayed in private practice failed spectacularly. Instead, we somehow landed in remarkably similar roles, facing many of the same opportunities and challenges.

What has impressed me most is not Emily's resume, although it is undeniably impressive. It is the consistency of her character.

The same person who worked tirelessly on student organizations, supported classmates, and found time to organize social events is now the leader who supports colleagues, mentors younger attorneys, strengthens professional organizations, serves civic institutions, and still prioritizes family.

That combination is increasingly rare — and increasingly important.

Emily Cantwell's career demonstrates that leadership is not simply about titles or accomplishments. It is about creating opportunities for others, strengthening institutions, and leaving people and communities better than you found them.

Through her work with BAMSL, her leadership within her firm, her service to Saint Louis University School of Law, her commitment to the Missouri Historical Society, and her investment in the next generation of lawyers, Emily has done exactly that.

As women continue to assume more leadership positions throughout our profession, leaders like Emily matter. Not because they are the loudest voices in the room, but because they demonstrate that effective leadership can be thoughtful, collaborative, and deeply invested in the success of others. That example may ultimately become one of Emily's most lasting contributions, with decades more to come.

What has impressed me most is not that Emily became a leader. It is that leadership never changed her. The same qualities that made her a trusted classmate and friend have made her an effective lawyer, mentor, civic leader, and colleague.

Lathrop GPM and the St. Louis legal and business community are fortunate to have her leadership. Those of us who have had the privilege of knowing her for many years are even more fortunate to call Emily a close friend. ♣

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