

Intent can be the most powerful noun of all. It serves as the base to support some of the most out-of-the-box ideas and innovations. These pages are an ode to women in a variety of management role—sales, marketing, finance, legal, client management and CEO. These are iconic women whose calculated choices and attributes make them role models for any of us.



WOMEN



This feature on “Women in Leadership” began in our second issue. In this sequel, eight women leaders chronicle the trajectory of their careers with Editor-in-Chief, Jasmine Bedi. They talk about treading lesser-known trails, being audacious, fighting disparity, or embracing success along with ‘me-time’.



LEAD

ERSHIP 2020



LEGAL

SHALINI SHARMA

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, GENERAL COUNSEL
VANTAGE DATA CENTERS

Shalini Sharma is the Senior Vice President, General Counsel, at Vantage Data Centers. She is an accomplished leader with more than 20 years of international corporate legal experience and 15 years of experience in global financial technology. Sharma's passions include her children and mentoring young and diverse attorneys.



It is not every day that you come across a woman General Counsel in the data center industry. Tell us about your journey.

Prior to law school, I interned at the United Nations and the U.S. Department of State. I was set on working in the public sector in international relations. My favorite classes in school were corporations and negotiation, and I excelled at both. So, I gave corporate law a chance. I practiced international corporate law at a firm in New York City for six years, and despite the long hours, I had a blast. When I became pregnant, I realized it was time for the most important job in my life—being a mother. I decided to take a job in-house to have a semblance of work-life balance. This was not my professional plan—I made decisions based on what felt right at the time. As an in-house attorney for 16 years, I got the opportunity to wear a legal as well as a business hat, and take on different roles supporting a variety of areas within a company. It has been a tremendous learning experience that helped me develop in-depth knowledge, making me an invaluable part of the team.

You have amassed a wealth of experience, working in private practice. What led you to join the data center industry?

Candidly, I stumbled into this industry, and I am delighted that I did! Having worked many years in financial technology, I was familiar with what a data center is, but not until I arrived at Vantage did I realize how dynamic it is. There are so many aspects and disciplines of law involved in running a successful data center business. I have particularly enjoyed getting involved with the real estate, design, engineering and construction teams. We are building something tangible that allows people around the world to connect when we are all relying on remote capabilities. And data centers are an integral part of the tangible brick and mortar infrastructure. The fact that I joined Vantage in the midst of a pandemic is not lost on me. Lawyers are typically risk-averse, but I am very mission-oriented, and I found the opportunity to be part of the engine that drives this much-needed connection extremely compelling.

What's your typical day at Vantage like?

In my role as General Counsel, I lead the legal function, which is the first-of-its-kind at the company. We have a global footprint, so my days start early checking in with the European team. The legal function gets involved in all parts of the business, from corporate governance and client contract negotiations to financing and M&A transactions. Then, there are the day-to-day matters of running a complex business in multiple jurisdictions. It is a challenging and exciting environment for a lawyer, but what makes my job so fulfilling is the exceptional talent that I have the privilege of working with. Data centers are about making connections—be they at the fundamental level of powering up a facility or the high-minded awareness of connecting millions of people to other worlds remotely. So, it is not a surprise to me that at Vantage, we have a vibrant culture of connection and support for one another. It's in our DNA.

In an era when businesses and individuals are more dependent on data than ever before, what key areas are at the intersection of law and technology as it pertains to accessibility of data?

It's fairly evident that data and access to data is power. There are many legal and moral challenges to navigate how we, as a society, protect data and respect individuals' privacy rights, and also provide equitable access to data when warranted. My own view is that education, transparency and accountability are key. When we are informed about what data is being used and why, and are held responsible for what we do with such data, there is incredible opportunity for businesses and individuals to do well. But governance is crucial.

What is your message to young women who are aspiring new entrants to this industry?

Please join us...you won't regret it! If you asked me early on in my career whether I would ever work in the data center industry, my response would have been a resolute, —'No. However, I have learned to trust my instincts and be open to change. The data center industry is young, and as a result, it is possible to make an impactful change. In my five months in the industry, I am struck by how inclusive it is. It is full of smart, savvy leaders who are keenly aware of the need for diverse perspectives in order to thrive. It is also a myth that this is an industry for simply STEM-minded individuals. While young women interested in a STEM career should most certainly consider it, so should women who have studied or have professional experience in other areas. This industry is poised for growth, and what will ensure such growth is the invaluable inclusion of smart, determined young women.

You are involved with a number of mentoring programs for early career and diverse attorneys. Can you talk about the goals of these programs?

Early in my career, I did not have any role models. My law firm was run by a management committee comprised of only men, and many lawyers I worked with in-house did not share the same ambition I had. When I left New York City to take a division General Counsel role in Denver, with my former company, I found my footing. Through networking and good fortune, I found myself in a position to share my experiences and mentor others. It is vital that we have windows and mirrors available to us throughout our careers. What I mean by this is the ability to see through to the next development in one's career and also see a reflection of one's self in that next role. While there are more women and women of color in leadership positions at law firms and companies than before, there is much work to be done. I prioritize finding time to mentor early career and diverse attorneys not only because I wish it had been available to me, but also because I see it as my responsibility to my profession. In order to create systemic change, I need to be a change agent. When we all share this mindset of diverse attorneys, the law firms and corporations they work for as well as the legal profession, will prosper.

What skills do you think women leaders of the future need to forge their path in this industry?

I firmly believe that there is no distinction between what makes an effective leader—female or male. The skills every leader needs are vision, determination and the ability to effectively collaborate while leading.

Can you tell us about your personal passion?

My passion is my kids. They are the most fascinating people on the planet to me, as well as a guaranteed good time to be around. While I think I am educating them through life, they are really educating me. Every major professional decision I have made has always been with their best interests in mind. As a result, I have no regrets about the path I've chosen so far. As they are getting older, I've had time to return to my former passions—the outdoors, cooking and yoga.

Sharma with her daughter



MY PASSION IS MY KIDS. THEY ARE THE MOST FASCINATING PEOPLE ON THE PLANET TO ME, AS WELL AS A GUARANTEED GOOD TIME TO BE AROUND. WHILE I THINK I AM EDUCATING THEM THROUGH LIFE, THEY ARE REALLY EDUCATING ME.