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MVP: Covington's Agnieszka Klich

By **James Mills**

Law360 (September 9, 2022, 3:29 PM EDT) -- Agnieszka Klich of Covington & Burling LLP worked on the $12 billion Jazan power plant project and $1.5 billion Red Sea gigacity utilities infrastructure project in Saudi Arabia, and the Redstone Concentrated Solar Power project in South Africa, earning her a spot as one of Law360's 2022 Project Finance MVPs.

HER PROUDEST MOMENT IN THE PAST YEAR:

Without hesitation, Klich reported that she's proudest of getting $12 billion worth of financing together for Jazan — an air separation, gasification and power plant project, and the world's largest facility of its kind.

"Having the project complete, making sure among the multiple funders we had, lenders from different jurisdictions. ... You find one business day that works for everybody in the month of October, but different countries have different holidays, and you actually make the money move on the day," she said.

"Making it all come together was an identifiable moment in time when things fell into place and that part of the deal was history."

HER BIGGEST CHALLENGE:

Klich had many complex projects in the past year, including arranging financing for the $1.5 billion Red Sea Project, which is actually eight different renewable energy infrastructure projects in western Saudi Arabia.

She also completed work on the Redstone Concentrated Solar Power project, which will ultimately supply stable electric power to 200,000 homes and is one of the largest investments ever done under South Africa's renewable energy independent power producer procurement program.

But Klich pointed to the work of maintaining an efficient, "seamless" team as her biggest challenge.

"You can have geniuses among the team members, but if there's one person that fails, it doesn't matter how good everybody else is. Yes, I lead the team, but like anything in life, you need a strong team, and

you're only as strong as the weakest link in your team. ... You need to make sure the team performs, that the team has time off and is well rested, that the team jells and works well together. It needs to be a machine."

WHY SHE BECAME A PROJECT FINANCE ATTORNEY:

While a student at Stanford Law School, Klich had no idea what area she wanted to specialize in. That changed when she was a summer associate at the firm now known as Milbank LLP. One of her first assignments was to gather information about development finance institutions that provide funds to develop infrastructure projects in undeveloped or underdeveloped areas.

"I did not know that this kind of thing existed. I didn't know that there were institutions that existed to aid development," she said. "Maybe because I was born and raised in Poland, which I felt was always in need of further development, or I felt there was imbalance in the world, but I was one of those idealistic students who thought I could make a difference."

She likes that as a lawyer, she can contribute to something tangible like the construction of power plants in places that didn't have sufficient power or constructing renewable energy projects in places that need to move away from fossil fuels.

"It really appealed to me that I was able to do something that I felt made a difference and that there was actually a practice area that contributed to that," she said.

WHAT MOTIVATES HER:

Klich said she's motivated by making a difference in the world and also by a more quotidian "sense of accomplishment."

"You have [a] small piece of scheduling, you have something to do, you finish it. I'm happy that it happened. It's behind me," she said. "But ultimately what motivates me is the fact I think the projects [I work on] make a difference. I don't think that I would be able to continue doing what I'm doing if I didn't have that sense that these projects make a difference, that these investments make a difference. It's a good feeling."

HER ADVICE TO YOUNG ATTORNEYS:

Klich emphasized that young attorneys must learn to be detail-oriented.

"Young lawyers need to remember that lawyers were invented to pay attention to detail. It is an unavoidable part of the job," she said. "I don't care how big a project, how small a project — attention to detail is what humans don't want to do most of the time but lawyers have to do. They have to do it without fail, and they have to do it with a degree of commitment. It is not for everyone, but it is an essential part of the job."

She also had specific advice for young female attorneys.

"There is a way to have a family and be able to work within this job. It's called a team," Klich, a mother of two sons, ages 17 and 6, said. "You have to have a team that doesn't fail you. If you have that, then you can do a lot more than you think you can do as a single human being. Nothing that we ever do is the effort of one person. It's important for women to remain in the job."

— As told to James Mills.

Law360's MVPs of the Year are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals, and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2022 MVP winners after reviewing more than 900 submissions.

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