Noelia Smith, CAP, Profiled By Influential Women, Highlights Persistence, Empathy, And Hard Work In A 25-Year Career

DENVER, CO, UNITED STATES, September 16, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Denver-Based Legal Operations Leader Champions Growth, Workplace Balance, and the Importance of Creating Opportunities for the Next Generation of Women

Denver, Colorado – Noelia Smith, CAP, has built a career around a simple but powerful philosophy: there is no substitute for hard work, determination, and the willingness to keep moving forward. With more than 25 years of experience in law firm management, Noelia has developed an extensive understanding of legal operations, administration, team coordination, and workplace leadership. Today, as Administration and Operations Manager at Michael Best & Friedrich LLP, she oversees the daily operations of the firm's Denver and Broomfield offices, supporting a team of nearly 100 people while helping create an environment where employees can succeed.

Her professional journey is especially notable because she did not begin at the top. Noelia started in the legal industry as a receptionist and file clerk before progressing into roles as a legal assistant and certified paralegal. Along the way, she gained experience across nearly every non-attorney position within the legal field, eventually moving into management and taking on responsibility for multi-office operations. Her journey from entry-level positions to managing operations across locations has given her a perspective that continues to shape how she leads.

Noelia's educational and professional background includes a degree from Florida International University, along with a Legal Assistant Certification, Paralegal Certificate, Administrative Professional Certificate, and Certified Administrative Professional (CAP) designation. She has also

completed professional development programs focused on leadership, emotional intelligence, adaptability, mental agility, team processes, and workplace management. In addition, she is a member of the Association of Legal Administrators' National and Mile High chapters and the International Association of Administrative Professionals.

For Noelia, however, professional accomplishments are only part of the story. Her definition of success is deeply connected to the example she wants to set for her two daughters and the lessons she learned from her mother. Her career reflects the belief that opportunities may not always arrive easily, but determination can help people create their own path.

Building a Career From the Ground Up

Noelia's professional story is rooted in firsthand experience. Rather than entering the legal profession in a senior leadership position, she worked her way through the industry, learning the fundamentals of law firm operations from the ground up.

Starting as a receptionist and file clerk taught her the importance of understanding the details behind an organization's daily operations. Her subsequent experience as a legal assistant and certified paralegal expanded her knowledge of the legal environment and gave her the opportunity to understand the demands faced by attorneys and administrative professionals alike.

That experience ultimately became one of her greatest leadership assets.

Having worked in numerous non-attorney roles, Noelia understands what it feels like to be at different levels of an organization. She has seen how individual responsibilities connect to larger operational goals, and she understands that effective management requires more than simply delegating tasks.

Her career eventually brought her into leadership positions across Florida, including managing multi-office operations in Tampa, Orlando, and Gainesville, before leading her professional journey to Denver. Today, she applies that accumulated knowledge to her work managing operations for Michael Best & Friedrich LLP's Denver and Broomfield offices.

For Noelia, advancement has never been about skipping steps. It has been about learning each step thoroughly enough to be prepared for the next one.

Defining What It Means to Be an Influential Woman

When Noelia considers what it means to be an influential woman, her thoughts immediately turn to her two daughters.

She wants them to see that hard work and dedication can make a meaningful difference in their lives. She recognizes that not everyone has access to the same educational opportunities, financial resources, or advantages. But she believes determination is something everyone can

possess.

Her message to her daughters is straightforward: whatever they want to become, they can pursue it if they are willing to put in the work required to reach their goals.

For Noelia, that vision of success is not limited to a specific career achievement. She wants women to understand that they can build lives that reflect their own definition of happiness, whether that includes children, a career, travel, personal fulfillment, or a combination of all of them.

She also sees the changing role of women in the workplace as an important part of that progress. In her view, women today have greater opportunities to enter traditionally male-dominated environments, excel within them, and create jobs and opportunities for other women.

Her own career serves as an example of that evolution, but Noelia sees herself as part of something much larger: a generation of women helping create more possibilities for those who follow.

The Advice She Gives to Women Chasing Their Dreams
If Noelia could offer one piece of advice to younger women pursuing their goals, it would be simple: don't stop.

Don't give up.

She believes one of the biggest challenges facing people today is the expectation that success should happen immediately. With social media and instant access to information, entertainment, communication, and images, people can become accustomed to getting things quickly. Noelia believes that expectation can create unrealistic ideas about how long it takes to build a meaningful career.

Her own experience has taught her that worthwhile goals rarely happen overnight.

Whether the path involves earning an education, developing a trade, beginning at an entry-level position, or working through difficult periods in a career, Noelia believes the process requires patience and persistence.

She compares the journey to climbing a ladder. Along the way, people may fall. They may get hurt, experience rejection, face setbacks, or discover that the path is harder than they anticipated. But falling off the ladder does not mean the climb is over.

The important thing is getting back up and continuing.

Noelia also emphasizes that reaching a goal does not mean the work is finished. Once someone achieves a dream, maintaining that achievement requires continued effort. Life may eventually become easier, but success still requires consistency and commitment.

That philosophy is one she shares not only with younger professionals but also with her own daughters.

Learning From the Woman Who Inspired Her Most
Noelia attributes much of her success to her mother, who is now 90 years old.

Her mother came to the United States from Cuba with a fourth-grade education and built her business from the ground up. Her example taught Noelia that people do not necessarily need every advantage to pursue what they want. They need the willingness to work for it.

That lesson became a guiding principle throughout Noelia's career.

Her mother's influence helped instill the belief that obstacles should not automatically become reasons to stop. If there is something worth pursuing, Noelia believes people should work toward it and refuse to allow circumstances to become permanent limitations.

That mindset helped Noelia reach a professional position she had long envisioned: managing a multi-state firm. Looking ahead, she says one of her ambitions would be to eventually manage a global or national organization with offices in other countries.

At the same time, she remains grateful for the career she has already built and recognizes that reaching her current position represents the fulfillment of a significant professional goal.

Staying Curious and Never Being Afraid Not to Know
One of the best pieces of career advice Noelia has received is to make sure she is not the smartest person in the room.

If she is, she believes, she may be in the wrong room.

For Noelia, professional environments should provide opportunities to learn. That means being willing to acknowledge when something is unfamiliar rather than pretending to know everything.

Throughout her career, she has encountered unfamiliar terminology and situations. Rather than allowing uncertainty to become an obstacle, she believes the better approach is to acknowledge the gap in knowledge, find the answer, and return with the information.

Modern technology has made that process easier.

With resources such as Google, artificial intelligence, and Copilot readily available, Noelia believes there are more tools than ever for professionals who are willing to learn. She recently experienced this firsthand while reviewing evaluations for a legal assistant position. An attorney described a candidate as a “polyglot,” a term Noelia did not know at the time. She looked it up and learned that it refers to someone who knows multiple languages.

For Noelia, the lesson was simple: there is no shame in not knowing something. The important part is taking responsibility for learning it.

Starting at the Bottom Can Be the Beginning of Something Bigger
Noelia strongly encourages young women entering the legal industry not to be afraid of starting at the bottom.

She recognizes the value of higher education and would never discourage someone from pursuing a college degree. At the same time, she acknowledges that education can be expensive and that traditional four-year education is not the right path for everyone.

Sometimes, she believes, the most important step is simply getting a foot in the door.

That could mean accepting a position as a receptionist, file clerk, runner, or another entry-level professional. It may not be the position someone ultimately wants, but it can provide access to an industry, valuable experience, professional relationships, and knowledge that can lead to future opportunities.

Noelia’s own career demonstrates the value of that philosophy.

Her journey from entry-level legal positions to operations management was built through experience. Every role contributed something to her understanding of the industry, eventually preparing her for greater responsibilities.

She believes that too many people want to enter a career at the top without first developing the experience and knowledge necessary to succeed there. While there can be exceptions, Noelia believes that for most people, advancement is something earned over time.

Growth Remains One of the Legal Profession’s Biggest Opportunities
From Noelia’s perspective, one of the greatest opportunities within her field is growth.

She sees the legal profession as offering a strong career path for people who want to establish stable and rewarding careers, including individuals who may not have a traditional four-year degree.

Entry-level positions can provide valuable exposure to the legal environment while allowing professionals to develop practical skills. As experience grows, those skills can lead to new

responsibilities and broader career opportunities.

Noelia believes the environment in which someone begins their career can also make a significant difference. Larger firms may offer more structured advancement opportunities, while smaller firms can provide valuable stepping stones that allow professionals to gain experience and develop their capabilities.

The key, in her view, is finding an environment where growth is possible.

At the same time, the legal industry faces challenges, particularly when it comes to work-life balance.

Workplace expectations have changed significantly, especially with the growth of remote work and evolving employee expectations around flexibility. For leaders, Noelia believes, the challenge is finding sustainable approaches that support both organizational needs and employee well-being.

Putting Balance at the Center of Leadership
Balance is one of the most important values in Noelia's professional and personal life.

Earlier in her career, she came from a mindset in which being constantly busy and continuously working was considered part of professional success. Over time, however, she learned that this approach is not sustainable.

Her own experience as a single parent working multiple jobs to support her family reinforced the importance of taking care of oneself. Noelia believes people have to be in the right headspace to effectively support others.

That philosophy is particularly important in her current leadership role, where she supports a team of nearly 100 people across two offices.

For Noelia, managing people means recognizing that employees are individuals with lives, responsibilities, pressures, and challenges outside the workplace. Leadership therefore requires empathy in addition to organization and accountability.

One of the most meaningful compliments she has received came from an assistant who told her that she felt seen and valued as a person, rather than simply as an employee.

That is precisely the type of workplace experience Noelia wants to create.

She believes that when employees feel understood and supported, they become more engaged and motivated and are better positioned to perform at their best. For her, empathy is not separate from performance; it is part of what makes strong performance possible.

A Leadership Philosophy Built on People

Noelia's leadership style reflects the combination of her extensive operational experience and her belief in servant leadership.

She understands that successful operations depend on consistency, communication, organization, and efficiency. But she also recognizes that organizations are ultimately powered by people.

That understanding influences how she approaches problems and supports her teams. Rather than viewing leadership solely as a position of authority, she sees it as a responsibility to help others succeed.

Her willingness to step into whatever role is necessary has remained a defining part of her professional philosophy. Whether she is assisting with an administrative task or guiding a broader office initiative, Noelia believes leaders should be willing to get involved and support their teams directly.

That practical approach is rooted in her own beginnings.

Because she remembers what it was like to start at the bottom, she understands the importance of being given an opportunity, learning through experience, and having leaders who recognize potential.

Looking Toward the Future

After more than 25 years in legal administration and operations, Noelia continues to approach her career with the same determination that helped her advance from her first entry-level position.

Her professional development remains ongoing. Her certifications and leadership training reflect a commitment to learning, while her memberships in professional organizations demonstrate her connection to the broader legal administration community.

Her ambitions may continue to evolve, but the principles behind them remain consistent.

Work hard.

Keep learning.

Do not be afraid to start at the bottom.

Find people who know more than you and learn from them.

Take care of yourself.

And when life knocks you off the ladder, get back up.

Noelia's story demonstrates that a successful career does not have to follow a perfectly straight path. It can be built through entry-level opportunities, unexpected lessons, difficult seasons, professional development, and persistence.

Most importantly, she hopes the lessons she has learned can help the next generation move forward with confidence.

For Noelia, being an influential woman is not simply about reaching a leadership position. It is about using that position to create an example for others, particularly her daughters and younger women entering the workforce.

Learn More about Noelia Smith:

Through her Influential Women profile, https://influentialwomen.com/connect/noelia-smith

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