

People and Culture the Secret Behind Torys' Montréal Successes

A distinct effort to prioritize culture rather than profit and numbers has been the driving force behind a successful five years of operation for Canadian law firm Torys' Montréal operation.

The firm opened the office—its fifth, including Torys' Legal Services Centre—in April 2013 in an effort to establish closer connections with its suite of Montréal and Québec-based clients.

The growth success of the [Montréal office](#) has been strategic from the outset.

First item on the agenda was to attract leading litigator [Sylvie Rodrigue](#) as the office's managing partner. Sylvie's undeniable business and legal acumen and wealth of experience in class actions litigation made Torys' geographical foray into Québec a lot more palatable.

While litigation work was the office's main focus in its infancy, the firm's presence in Montréal meant it could continue to work in a more hands-on capacity with its Montréal-based clients that were completing work outside the province.

Although the Montréal office was initially lauded for its class action litigation expertise—given Sylvie's practice—it quickly became a powerhouse in other practice areas.

In another next strategic move, in July 2017 seasoned litigator [Christopher Richter](#) was poached from Woods LLP to help establish the firm's expertise in broader civil and commercial litigation.

“It was a huge decision for me to jump ship to Torys but after speaking with Sylvie and learning about the firm's direction, objectives and the way they went about things I knew it was the right career move for me,” Christopher said.

It's moves like this that has seen the office quickly develop its expertise over the five years.

When the doors opened in 2013 it was Sylvie and a single associate holding down the fort; now it boasts three partners, seven associates and has started recruiting summer and articling students.

While from the outside it might seem like the Bay St firm is running a lean operation in Montréal, those in the trenches see it as quite the opposite and feel just as much a part of Torys as if they were sitting in Toronto.

“We're not really ‘Torys Montréal’, we're just ‘Torys’,” Sylvie said.

“We are one litigation group in the firm, not two litigation groups in two offices.

“It's this one-team mentality that really separates us from other law firms and has contributed to the success of the Montréal office over the last five years.”

The one-team approach is more than a vague mantra as it's evident in office's ability to handle litigation work in both civil law and common law provinces.

Sylvie, Chris and the office's third partner [Bill McNamara](#)—who joined from Norton Rose in 2015 in another strategic headhunt—are called to both the Québec and Ontario Bar and practice law in all provinces.

Most of the associates in Montréal have followed suit which gives Torys a unique point of difference and allows its clients the ability to work with only one team of Torys lawyers when faced with multi-jurisdictional class actions.

As for expansion, Sylvie said the firm doesn't have KPIs for growing its staff, profits or clients. Instead, the office will grow and expand to not only match the demands of the market but, more importantly, to match the needs of its clients.

"We work closely with all of our client to understand their needs, and if it's appropriate, we'll grow and expand our team and services to meets those needs," Sylvie said.

But even in its continued expansion, the process will remain calculated with the firm preferring culture-led hires over profit or client-led hires.

In fact, Sylvie added that recruiting well had been one of the office's biggest challenges in its first five years.

"In the first 12 months of being in Montréal we were constantly approached by lawyers wanting to join the firm," she said.

"It's a great problem to have but we didn't just fling the doors open to anyone. We handpicked people who we knew would thrive in our culture, and that's not that easy to find.

"We could have 50 lawyers by now if we wanted to but achieving a certain number was never the goal, responding to client needs while preserving Torys culture is the goal.

"The culture of the firm is protected like gold and we'll never compromise it. It seems so simple but it's amazing how unique that can be in law firms.

"Elbow high behaviour or people who are working solely for their own recognition are not tolerated at Torys, it is simply not who we are.

"Our motto is simple—we provide the highest excellence in the quality of our services and offer every client the best team for the job."

With growth and expansion inevitable, the next five years could look vastly different from the first five. But one thing is for certain, Torys culture will always be the first ingredient in its formula for success.

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About Torys

Torys LLP is a respected international business law firm with a reputation for quality, innovation and teamwork. Our experience, our collaborative practice style, and the insight and imagination we bring to our work have made us our clients' choice for their largest and most complex transactions as well as for general

matters in which strategic advice is key. Torys operates from offices in Toronto, New York, Calgary, Montréal and Halifax.
