

VANGUARD

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Nausheen Rokerya – Visiting Nurse Service of New York

Lawyer embraces change through COVID challenges

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It's hard to remember a time before the COVID-19 pandemic. The days before social distancing and mask mandates often feeling like a lifetime ago.

"I often joke that I don't even know what I did before COVID," says [Nausheen Rokerya](#). "These days, roughly 75 percent of my meetings relate to work generated by the pandemic."

As vice president, associate general counsel for [Visiting Nurse Service of New York](#), she spends her time navigating vaccine mandates, ensuring compliance with evolving healthcare-related regulations, and helping management address employment-related challenges the pandemic has created.



Nausheen Rokerya | Vice President and Associate General Counsel | Visiting Nurse Service of New York

VNSNY, founded in 1893, provides home and community-based health care in New York City's five boroughs, as well as in Long Island and Westchester. Throughout the pandemic, the nonprofit has helped ease the load on hospitals by providing home-based services upon discharge, including for patients with COVID-19. Rokerya says her work during the pandemic has required balancing legal, financial and safety considerations, amongst others.

"Beginning in March 2020, we had to make difficult decision after difficult decision, often outside of the traditional legal framework, with little time or opportunity to do a full assessment of risk, as a lawyer might otherwise do," she says. "As lawyers, we're trained to be risk-averse, but sometimes that training can make it difficult to embrace necessary change."

Business impact

Because the pandemic is always evolving, Rokerya says it's created a need for constant advice and counsel.

"Though we're still in the pandemic, this isn't the same pandemic we were in a year ago," she says. "I've had to stay nimble."

She meets with VNSNY leaders almost daily to discuss legal developments and advise on how the organization may respond. Given the breadth and reach of the pandemic's impact, these meetings have introduced her to areas, processes and people within the organization that she was previously unfamiliar with.

Serving as an advisor to VNSNY's senior leadership has deepened her understanding of how divisions at VNSNY—including its insurance arm and home care, and its hospice and managed health services businesses—respond to crisis. She's also realized the value of strong inter-company communication and partnerships.

"The better informed I am about the needs and preferences of a particular business unit, the better I can be at providing tailored support and advice," she says.

This doesn't just apply to supporting the leadership team, she says. Rokerya also works closely with other groups at VNSNY, including the human resources, compliance, communications and quality teams, since being promoted to vice president last year.

"You get to see the range of impact your advice can have when working across businesses," she says.

Broadening her skills

Trained as a labor and employment lawyer, Rokerya has welcomed the diversification of her responsibilities, as it's enabled her to learn and grow. Managing teams and projects are skillsets she's enjoyed cultivating, she says.

For example, Rokerya has provided critical advice to VNSNY's Workplace of the Future initiative, which is dedicated to designing and modernizing the experience of VNSNY's post-pandemic workforce. She's also been awarded opportunities to manage litigation unrelated to labor and employment, which she says has been rewarding.

"Personally I benefit because I'm gaining new skills and experiences, but it also allows the organization to operate in a leaner fashion because I can now take on a broader array of tasks," she says.

While these hard skills have been important for Rokerya to hone, she says they've also shown her "softer components" of the business. One of the biggest things she's learned over the past year is the importance of supporting local community organizations that are often underfunded.

"Working here has opened my eyes to the critical gaps in community resources that nonprofit organizations can help fill," Rokerya says. "Having seen how impactful such organizations can be, I find myself seeking out opportunities to show my support or otherwise get involved. I want to bring visibility to this entire segment of people, not only at VNSNY, who are sometimes invisibly providing incredible services to populations in need."

The social good

Rokerya says working at VNSNY has enabled her to marry her passion for law with her desire to support the community.

After earning her bachelor's degree from the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University, and a J.D. from Brooklyn Law School, she began her career at the firm Proskauer Rose as an associate in its labor and employment department. She also spearheaded several diversity and inclusion initiatives at the firm.

In 2014, she moved to VNSNY, where she's worked on labor-union negotiations, acquisitions, investigations and compliance-related initiatives.

"I love that my work allows me to contribute to greater good," Rokerya says. "The organization supports New Yorkers in need, so it feels great to be a part of. It's incredible what our frontline workers do and it's rewarding to know my legal advice helps."