

SEH LEGAL FAQ



A NEW AND INNOVATIVE NICHE LAW FIRM, SPECIALISING IN CORPORATE FINANCE AND RESTRUCTURING, CREATED BY SANDRA ESQUIVA-HESSE, FORMER PARTNER AT AN INTERNATIONAL LAW FIRM

Why did you decide to create SEH Legal?

With a team of multicultural and multilingual attorneys, I founded SEH Legal in April 2011 to provide all clients – including SMEs, mid-caps, and large caps alike – the quality of services found in large international firms and to guide them through the various stages of their development. Our goal: turning the Law into a lever of their growth and a mean to deal with challenges.

SEH Legal works directly with its clients to help with settlements, corporate transactions, financing, restructuring, insolvency and liquidation proceedings, as well as corporate litigation matters.

Coming from international law firms, we offer expertise and excellence, while being attentive to innovation and research. Not only multilingual, our “multicultural” approach enables us to be adaptable. As a result, we can bridge the gap between the transactional and the legal world, between SMEs and large caps, and between the corporate world and financial institutions.

I want SEH Legal to be a “new generation” law firm, accessible, independent and innovative, providing every client with *a way to think broader*.

You left behind a large international law firm, where you were a Partner and you had the opportunity to become an equity Partner. Why?

It was a natural progression. Very early in my career, when I was at Shearman & Sterling in New York in 1998, or at Clifford Chance in Paris, clients and associates entrusted me with a broad range of responsibilities, and then in 2006, Paul Hastings presented me with a very entrepreneurial opportunity when they suggested that I should set up their finance and restructuring office in Paris.

I have a taste for entrepreneurship and setting up my own firm in 2011 was the logical next step that fitted with both my way of operating and with a shift in the market. My clients and my peers have given me so much support to set off in this direction, and it makes a lot of sense given my speciality. If I were an expert in capital markets, it would not have made as much sense. Freedom is more important to me than being comfortable, and I’m eager to implement innovative working methods. I would rather do so by building my start-up in law, as these innovations would certainly not have been successful within larger firms that are expected to hold to a collective discipline, which is important for efficiency and staff stability.

My will to innovate was stronger, and I had to leave to fully follow my convictions, including a desire to work with clients of all sizes, including small businesses, without limiting the quality of service provided.

It is said that you have an innovative view of corporate law. Can you tell us a little more about it?

SEH Legal offers a “strategic” approach to corporate law when counselling its clients on corporation transactions, financing, restructuring, and insolvency and liquidation proceedings.

This guidance also applies to litigation, which is why it is important that we maintain our independence, to prevent conflicts of interest and to be free to represent our clients. The team considers itself as a loyal long-term partner for the clients it counsels. There are values for which we stand. This statement also reflects in our billing methods, which are tailored on a case-by-case basis (hourly rates are not an absolute value; subscription plans, package rates, or success fees may be more appropriate).

You also chose to develop a strong legal R&D component in your organisation. What does that mean?

Having a modern approach also means devoting time to analyse the current challenges that our clients and their industries are facing, by helping them find pragmatic and appropriate solutions. For instance, we created a “think tank”, where we can hold discussions, exchange ideas, and share researches within our team, and we hold “innovation meetings” to inspire our clients with fresh, new ideas.

Many companies have a Research and Development department. Law firms should also invest some of their time in R&D so they don’t limit themselves to apply the Law, and become useful contributors to the overall vision of their clients. Some of our work has proven this, such as the research on trusts we have been implementing since 2007, but also some innovative applications of our rule of law that earned us recognition in the *Financial Times* in October 2010 (ranked #2 worldwide of the “Most Innovative Lawyers of the Year”). We often take our inspiration from foreign legal systems, and we challenge theories that consider the French legal environment as hostile by definition.

What are your areas of expertise?

The firm has a multidimensional and strategic focus on commercial law, corporate law, financial law, law for businesses in financial hardship (insolvency and liquidation proceedings, trade disputes), and corporate litigation.

For areas outside of its expertise (i.e. tax law, intellectual and artistic property law, environmental law, competition law, and commercial leasing law), SEH Legal is able to recommend the services of an extensive network of independent associates and peers, in France and around the world, at reasonable fees, with whom clients can build smooth, trusted relationships.

However, if clients already have specialists in those areas, SEH Legal is always happy to cooperate with them and work as a team with colleagues and experts. This is often enriching for us, and it benefits the clients by building a stronger team of counsel around them.

Can you tell us how the firm is structured? How many employees do you have?

The attorneys and employees of SEH Legal come from international law firms, each with their own complementary specialisations. We are quite comfortable drafting documents and conducting business in English, and we can revise complex documents and provide excellent services while handling large volumes of cases under tight deadlines.

The firm was created in April 2011, they were seven of us in June. We will grow to accommodate to customer needs, but I plan to continue operating like a family, with much closeness. We will quickly reach a critical size that I do not wish to exceed.

How do you handle restructurings while managing such a light structure?

I believe this model is better suited to the needs of our cases, due to the speed and flexible attention they require. Most restructuring cases require solid senior-level expertise and an ongoing presence of associate attorneys that do more than plainly supervising and coordinating. Even if there may be a substantial number of services to provide, a strategic vision must be coordinated, for the legal portion by an expert who draws together different areas of law. As far as I am concerned, I have always operated this way, and will continue to do so. Our restructuring team has the same variety of skills you could find in large organisations to meet these needs.

For specific areas of expertise, like environmental law, we will keep on working with our partners, unless our clients already have experts in the required specialities. Instead of using these resources internally, as it is done in multi-skills firms, we will call for these skills through our network, which I feel is just as effective for clients.

What does it mean to have an innovative management method?

Departing from the “up or out” rule, SEH Legal operates in the spirit of teamwork and meritocracy, that does not solely depend on credentials and seniority, but rewards excellence in all its forms as well as proactive and creative involvement. There is a great deal of transparency within our firm, and we do not subscribe to the principle of linear “year after year” growth in skills, hourly rates, and salaries.

In life, we may all experience times when things slow down or, on the opposite, speed up. This must be acknowledged (which is the benefit of the niche) without adversely affecting the stability of the firm or the sustainability of our team. Every one of us is attentive to the urgent needs of our clients and those of our own lives. If a personal incident requires an attorney to be out for a week, the whole team sticks together and does what it takes to stay on target and cover for the missing attorney, so that when he or she returns, as client requests have been satisfied without a hitch, everything is under control.

Who do you counsel?

SEH Legal provides close guidance to small, mid, and large caps to help them overcome obstacles they encounter in operating their businesses, including inception, business operations (changes in governance, growth, winding down, litigation), end-of-life, and business succession. We also represent shareholders, creditors, or other company partners.

Our clients range from a turnover of €1 million to more than €1 billion and include SMEs, listed companies, financial institutions, investment funds, French clients, American clients, European clients, and Asian clients.

For all clients, my vision is to have a niche law firm extremely responsive that offers highly accurate expertise, sharing close, transparent, and trustworthy relationships with its clients.