

Froman: in defence of multilateralism

Michael Froman, the former US trade representative and the man who negotiated the Trans-Pacific Partnership has offered an impassioned defence of globalisation and multilateralism in response to the Trump Administration's so-called America First policy.

Froman, who was also deputy national security advisor for international economic affairs under former president Barack Obama insisted that if the US was to leave the World Trade Organisation (WTO) it would lose the moral high ground accrued over decades of multilateral cooperation.

In March this year the Trump administration announced a sharp break from US trade policy, vowing it may ignore certain rulings by the WTO if those decisions infringe on US sovereignty.

"You can't just walk away from the WTO," said Froman. While admitting that there was a temptation to argue that the system is outdated and

it works against the US, he argued that it was the US that originally campaigned for the WTO precisely because its government wanted to prevent other countries from acting unilaterally.

The Trump administration's new trade approach, which was sent to Congress earlier this year, could affect businesses and consumers worldwide, with the White House suggesting the US could unilaterally impose tariffs against countries it thinks have unfair trade practices.

"If other countries act unilaterally and we do the same then we lose the moral high ground," said Froman, adding that doing so would create two major risks. "One risk is retaliation as other countries impose tariffs, and the other risk is imitation: if they see the US thumbing its nose at its international obligations then they will be only too happy to do the same."

Hold on to the TPP

Froman, who was speaking at a lunchtime engagement at yesterday's

Our number one export is political entertainment

conference, also defended the TPP. The agreement is a 12-nation trade deal that originally included the US, Japan, Mexico, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Vietnam, Peru, Chile, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei.

On his first day in office, President Trump signed an executive order removing the US from the TPP, and declared an end to the era of multinational trade agreements. But Froman, who was instrumental in negotiating the deal during his time in government, warned against such retrenchment.

"Leaving the TPP will be seen as one of the biggest strategic blunders in recent years," he said.

According to Froman, this retreat of the US comes at a time when China has become more sophisticated in its use of hard and soft power. Recent initiatives include the One Belt One Road, and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, a proposed free trade agreement between the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

"China has a coherent strategy and is executing on it very well," said Froman. "It has sought the high ground when it comes to trade and the environment. The question is whether the US has a regional strategy of its own," he added.

Froman was philosophical about dealing with the new Trump administration. "As a member of the previous administration it is all too tempting to stand up here and be critical of the current one, but it's not in anyone's interest," he said. "However, it's fair to say our number one export is political entertainment at the moment."

Mentoring: the keys to success

Be on time. Be nice - but not overly-familiar. Ask questions of your mentees. But more than anything, treat them with respect. These were some of the tips offered in yesterday morning's 'The partner as a coach and mentor' session.

Partners from the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Europe offered personal experiences gleaned from their roles as both mentors and mentees. Whether managing motivation and performance of young lawyers or building client and commercial skills from an early stage, the key in modern management lies in investing in individual, tailored and on-the-job learning relationships, they said.

Mentors are like parents who want to live their dreams through their mentees

Irina Paliashvili, founder of the Washington-based RULG-Ukrainian Legal Group explained how her formative experiences in what was then a totalitarian former-Soviet state with no private practice law firms shaped her view of mentoring.

"The international legal community helped us," she said. The American Bar Association supported the new wave of graduates at the time and they were distributed to 12 law firms, with Paliashvili locating to Jenner & Block in Chicago. "When I got back to Ukraine I wanted to replicate that. We had none of that mentoring culture here and we were the first generation of founders of law firms."

Keep your distance

Paliashvili offered a personal view of how her role as coach and mentor has changed over the years. "Somewhere in the middle of my career I thought we should all be best friends. That doesn't work; your colleagues and junior lawyers are not your pals. It is still important to mentor and help them but you have to keep a professional environment," she said.



All panellists agreed that mentees simply needed to be treated with respect. "Sometimes it just takes one question: 'how are you doing?' It opens the door to a longer discussion," said Paliashvili. "But you should also expect your mentees to disagree with you, and go their own way sometimes. Mentors are like parents who want to live their dreams through their mentees, but that doesn't always work," she added.

Hanim Hamzah, a partner at ZICO Law in Singapore outlined her firm's structured mentorship programme, which has enabled the firm to achieve a mix of 52% female

lawyers, with strong representation at senior level.

Elsewhere in the session Kimathi Kuenyehia of Kimathi & Partners in Ghana offered the perspective of the mentee and how he has gleaned information from senior figures in lieu of a formal mentor structure.

"I make the most of opportunities to meet people I look up to," he said, adding that he identifies the figures who can help him in the community - often through the IBA - and targets them. "I'll follow up with a present - a signed book, or similar, that I send to everyone, to show them I appreciate their mentoring," he said.