

Advancement of Women Lawyers In Private Practice: Learning From Their Sisters in Corporate Legal Departments and from Senior Lawyers In Private Practice

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As the voice of women in the law, National Association of Women Lawyers (“NAWL”) in 2006, challenged corporations and law firms to double their number of women general counsel and equity partners from 15% to 30% by 2015. Recent statistics indicate that the “NAWL Challenge” for corporate legal departments in Fortune 500 corporations already has been met.

Women today comprise 30% of General Counsels, when only a few years ago they comprised only 15% of the General Counsels in the same companies. This achievement is in sharp contrast to **the fate of women lawyers in the 200 largest U.S. law firms (“AmLaw 200”), where women have stagnated at 17% or less of those law firms’ equity partners** since NAWL’s annual survey of the advancement of women lawyers began.

Ask anyone in corporations --from mid-sized to the largest in the country -- and they will tell you that they have embraced diversity and inclusion -- their customers, their audience, their constituents are diverse-- and their leadership, including their lawyers, must be diverse. Many have overhauled their in-house legal departments and the way they deal with and select their outside counsel. They have created comfortable and welcoming environments in which their dedicated and loyal women lawyers can thrive.

Apparently not so in the highest echelons of the largest law firms in this country (indeed, globally). **For the first time, this year, there has been a decrease in the number of first year women law students and the number of women in entering classes of associates at AmLaw 200 firms.** Is this an aberration or is this the result of the disillusionment of women with a legal profession that is viewed by many as inhospitable to women.?

To be sure, there are thousands of women lawyers in this country in many different practice settings who have advanced, are leaders, and love the practice of law. I am one of them and have spent almost 35 years loving what I do as a professional each and every day. Many of NAWL’s leaders and members have similar feelings. As an organization, NAWL brings those lawyers together whenever it can to share their experiences with younger lawyers and impart views as to how the practice of law can be a nurturing professional experience for women, and one in which they can

achieve whatever success they desire.

This year's NAWL Mid-Year Meeting at Disney World in Orlando promises to make its own significant contribution to that effort. STRETCHED & BALANCED: A Holistic Approach to Law Practice for the Woman Lawyer, will be held at the Grand Floridian from February 14-16. Highlighting the event will be programs for both in-house and outside counsel, including:

- The Male Factor: What Every Woman Lawyer needs to Know about How Men and Clients View Women Attorneys in the Workplace
- Ethical Issues for Inside and Outside Counsel
- Circuit Training: 10 Legal Issues Every Lawyer Should Understand
- Do You Want to Make More Money? Negotiating Your Compensation
- From Daunting to Doable: How to Build Positive Client Relationships and Become a Rainmaker in the Process

The timeliness of the educational programs, the wisdom imparted by the speakers and the unparalleled networking opportunities will offer significant guidance and assistance to lawyers both in private practice and in-house, as they strive to achieve continued success for themselves, their law firms and their companies. For more information on the Mid-Year Meeting, go to www.nawl.org.

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