

Female Powerbrokers Q&A: Duval & Stachenfeld's Adler



Law360, New York (June 05, 2014, 10:22 AM ET) -- Terri L. Adler is a co-founder of Duval & Stachenfeld LLP in New York and chairwoman of the firm's real estate practice group. She has handled a multitude of national and international real estate and corporate real estate transactions. She was named as one of the Top 50 Women Attorneys in New York Super Lawyers in both 2012 and 2013. Additionally, Adler was elected to The Commercial Observer's Power 100 Reader's Poll along with Bruce Stachenfeld.

Q: How did you break into what many consider to be an old boys' network?

A: It never occurred to me that I wasn't already in the network or that I needed to break in or be invited. I approach every situation with the belief that I will be judged on my brains and abilities and not on my gender. Even if that isn't true, I can't be bothered by someone who is so closed-minded that they would dismiss me because I am a woman.

Q: What are the challenges of being a woman at a senior level within a law firm?

A: Juggling the needs of my family with the needs of running a firm and a department always presents challenges. I think this challenge is increasingly a challenge of both genders. I have commented to people that if you are a parent, a spouse and a lawyer, then on some days you are going to have pick which one of those jobs you are going to do well (and accept that the others will survive to be picked first on another day).

Q: Describe a time you encountered sexism in your career and tell us how you handled it.

A: Someone commented to me once that "I would never let my wife work as hard as you do." I laughed out loud and said, "Does she know she is supposed to ask you? Because I'd like to be there when you tell her." I have a tendency to respond to sexism with humorous incredulity.

Q: What advice would you give to an aspiring female attorney?

A: Don't let others take the spotlight. Take charge and promote your ideas and yourself. Ultimately, you are your own advocate and you who will determine your success. Too many talented women are overlooked (not due to a lack of talent or any discrimination but because they simply allow themselves to fade into the background). You have to be willing to take chances, to be part of team, to fail, to pick yourself, to speak out, and ultimately to push yourself forward.

Q: What advice would you give to a law firm looking to increase the number of women in its partner ranks?

A: Be flexible in providing different paths to success for talented lawyers who may need to have modifications to the "standard" work schedule. Why would you waste years training someone to then have them leave due to an inability to have their work fit into the demands of their personal lives? For what it's worth, I don't just apply this thinking to women at my own firm. I think more and more men are looking for different career paths and I try to be flexible to each individual's needs regardless of gender."

Q: Outside your firm, name an attorney you admire and tell us why.

A: Sonia Sotomayor. She is a fierce woman who has achieved amazing success, all while unapologetically maintaining (and putting forth to the world) a strong sense of who she is (both as a woman and a Latina).

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