

4 Female Perspectives On BigLaw Leadership

By **Madeleine McDonough, Angela Styles, Jami Wintz McKeon and Regina Pisa**

Law360, New York (July 23, 2017, 8:02 PM EDT) -- Recent increases in the number of women at the BigLaw partnership level have been incremental at best, according to the annual Law360 Glass Ceiling report. Meanwhile, the senior management side suffers an even greater disproportion of women to men — only a handful of the largest U.S. firms are led by women. We thought it would be interesting to hear from a few of the female leaders who have beaten the odds. Here, in their own words, are perspectives from Shook Hardy & Bacon Chair Madeleine McDonough, Crowell & Moring Chair Angela Styles, Morgan Lewis & Bockius Chair Jami Wintz McKeon and Goodwin Procter Chair Emeritus Regina Pisa.

Madeleine McDonough, Shook Hardy & Bacon LLP



Corporate legal departments have made more progress in advancing women and minorities than law firms. Law firms struggle to reinvent their compensation, evaluation and development systems to interrupt implicit bias and create cultural competency in meaningful — and measurable — ways. Firms often rely on informal networks to keep business flowing across a chain of people with much in common, often to the detriment of women and minorities.

At Shook, we have revamped our succession planning and compensation systems to try to resolve these inequities. We train our leaders and relationship partners not only to be cognizant of these blind spots within the organization, but to proactively address them by partnering with clients to get a 360-degree view of our own performance. We also use an open partner compensation system to ensure dialogue and transparency. We put ourselves in our clients' shoes: Who will be the best fit for their immediate needs as well as their long-term business goals? What talents do we have to build the best team for the best results? As complex problems increasingly require collaboration across practices, borders and even other law firms — and as our client organizations become more inclusive and diverse — we are seeing that these experiences help build meaningful client relationships that thrive, not in spite of these challenges, but often because of them.

Many women in law also talk about the burden of proving their competence. Developing inclusive leaders helps interrupt this burden. We also know women are overmentored but undersponsored, so at Shook we look at how we are intentionally championing and developing female lawyers. Law firms must rethink how biases are reinforced by seemingly blind, merit-based practices. Firms must agree on measurable goals with deadlines for implementing change and hold the organization accountable by offering transparency to its constituents and its clients. There is only so much an individual — even an exceptional one — can do; the next step is for firm leaders to scrutinize the systems that unintentionally create barriers and change those practices. Creating a culture of belonging and psychological safety is a critical component of engaging and advancing women.

I would advise future female leaders to let their curiosity drive their initiative. Don't wait for someone to identify an opportunity for you; use your insights — and your unique challenges — to create and foster leadership where none existed before. Don't be afraid to experiment. Take the things that have felt alienating in the past and integrate those experiences and characteristics into your approach for adding value to your firm and to your career. Shook's female partners saw a need to increase their presence in the firm's leadership ranks and formed the firm's Women's Management Council more than a decade ago to address the challenges they shared with one another and with their clients. Now our junior women attorneys have founded their own council to address these issues at an earlier stage in their careers. Understand the systems within your firm, identify gaps in its performance, or find an unmet client need, and focus your efforts where they will make the most impact. Bring your full self forward to meet the challenges.

Angela Styles, Crowell & Moring LLP



Over the past several years, law firm diversity programs have raised our understanding of gender diversity issues and advanced some women into leadership positions. But programming alone is simply not enough. The question leaders (at corporations and law firms) now must ask is: How can we disrupt the status quo?

Change starts at the top — at corporations and at law firms. We've tried to abide by that at Crowell & Moring: The way our firm is structured, the way we compensate people and the way we work together allow lawyers to succeed based on their merits. And I think it has largely worked: Crowell & Moring had the first female chair of a major Washington firm, and we have women succeeding in leadership here — serving on the board and playing significant roles in the strategic direction of the firm.

However, at the end of the day, it is business — revenue in the door and clients — that is the key to success within a law firm. The difference between success and failure is oftentimes the presence of partners and clients in positions of power who become champions for those on their way up. These are partners and clients who are willing to spend their time and political capital to help advance younger lawyers at our firm. When a partner or client in a position of influence takes an interest in advancing and sponsoring an up-and-coming lawyer, it makes all the difference.

Corporate clients who are committed to helping their firms advance the needle on gender and diversity

wield great influence — perhaps more than they know. While many companies express a desire or preference for law firms to become more diverse and help female attorneys break the glass ceiling, few demand it. Clients who make their first call to women or diverse lawyers send a powerful message from the outside. Clients who set diversity goals, measure those goals and are willing to move work if the goals are not met are the ones who empower law firm leaders to take the long view toward positioning female and diverse attorneys for success. When clients use their buying power to truly influence diversity, they give more diverse lawyers opportunities to take on tough matters that build business and ensure they are in the room at the right time. It is a long-term and all-in commitment that takes both the law firm and the client.

The advancement of gender diversity relies on all of the influencers within the legal community coming together to create the space for success, whether it's clients, senior partners or the next generation. When diversity is thriving, it becomes a natural outpouring of the culture of a firm and a model to help drive its business.

Jami Wintz McKeon, Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP



Increasing gender diversity in law firms — and particularly in leadership positions — is top of mind for our firm as well as our clients. A diverse team brings a variety of perspectives to every issue, and a conscious focus on diversity allows us to attract, retain and promote the best talent. As a result, Morgan Lewis has invested in looking closely at how we can ensure that our firm is leading the way in breaking through the historic barriers to leadership facing women.

During my time as chair, we have contributed to many external efforts devoted to studying and advancing the role of women in the legal profession, including those created by the ABA, Harvard Law, Direct Women and Catalyst. We also prioritize internal efforts aimed at promoting gender diversity, including training all of our partners on implicit bias, having an initiative focused on business development for women and participating in programs with our clients designed to increase and advance

the women in their ranks and in ours.

Having an inclusive environment is essential to any diversity initiative, and understanding our own often unconscious assumptions is an important foundational piece of building such an environment. At Morgan Lewis, we have long offered implicit-bias training to our clients and their executives, and our partners go through that training as well. These sessions highlight the effects of inclusion on employee engagement and the impact that implicit bias has on creating a diverse, inclusive and highly engaged workforce, and they help equip all decision makers with the practical tools necessary to address this bias. Morgan Lewis was in the vanguard in developing these programs, which are now recognized as essential elements of the onboarding and leadership development process throughout much of corporate America.

Beyond training, we are making investments that knock down any unintentional barriers to success. For example, we launched an industry-leading remote working program, which allows eligible associates to work two days a week from home. While heralded as a breakthrough for working mothers, our program

actually is open to all — reflecting our commitment to inclusion in all aspects of our firm. And we are proudly partnering with Diversity Lab to pilot the new Mansfield rule initiative, which involves a commitment that women and minorities make up 30 percent of any candidates for firm leadership and governance roles. We are already mindful of this need for balance, but we recognize the value in being public about our commitments to advance the opportunities for women. It is now acknowledged that women leave the profession more often because they perceive an absence of opportunity than because of a search for an elusive work-life balance. So we focus on making sure that women have and see those opportunities. That we have a female chair and many other female leaders in our firm sends a strong signal that there is no glass ceiling at Morgan Lewis, but we hope that the profession will progress to the point where this is not such an unusual circumstance.

Regina Pisa, Goodwin Procter LLP



When my partners elected me chairman and managing partner of Goodwin, it was the first time a woman had been named chief executive of a BigLaw firm. Over the next two decades, I had the opportunity to lead nearly 2,000 people through significant institutional change. During that time, Goodwin grew from a regional New England firm to one with more than 1,000 attorneys practicing in 10 offices across the United States, Europe and Asia.

How does a young girl from a blue-collar town, born of Italian immigrant parents, end up leading one of the nation's largest law firms? Here is where I am supposed to tell you about my grand plan. But there was no plan. I often joke that my career has been driven by "dumb luck." Yet the truth is that we make our own luck — through the networks we cultivate and the opportunities we create.

To the women coming up behind me who are making their way in the profession, I offer 10 pieces of advice, on leadership and in life:

10. **Figure out what you love to do and do it with passion.** You can be good at almost anything, but you will only be great at something you truly love to do.

9. **Take charge of your career.** This will mean different things at different points in your life. At all times, though, it means you should not wait to be offered a seat at the table. Pull up a chair.

8. **Take some risks.** Women do not take enough risks in their careers. You have to be willing to try new things because they create the greatest opportunity.

7. **Do not let failure stand in your way, because you will have failures.** Periodic failure is the inevitable result of taking risks and the only way to make progress.

6. **Live your values.** If you want people to follow you, you have to give them something to believe in, something bigger than themselves.

5. **Find your own style and voice.** To be most effective, you have to embrace a style and voice that is authentic and reflects who you are.

4. **Do not be afraid to be compassionate.** Women have a tremendous advantage in life: We listen and we care. This makes us extraordinarily adept at building relationships and managing people, which are, after all, much of what life is about.

3. **Seek out mentors.** I am a big believer of mentors in life, especially for women. And your mentors need not be other women. Some of my greatest mentors have been men.

2. **Understand the difference between management and leadership.** Management is determining how best to go down a certain path. Leadership is determining which path to go down.

1. **Dare to dream.** Do not ever let anyone tell you that you cannot do something. My father came to the United States after World War II believing that all things were possible in his new home. He told me that every day as a child, and I believed him. That is how I have led Goodwin and how I have lived my life.

The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the firm, its clients, or Portfolio Media Inc., or any of its or their respective affiliates. This article is for general information purposes and is not intended to be and should not be taken as legal advice.
