

TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR CAREER: Becoming a Leader in Your Organization and Community

By Lee Wallace

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The statistics aren't good. According to a number of studies, women lawyers are not making partner in nearly the numbers expected. Women are paid less than men, and they are unhappier in their careers.

How do you become a leader in your firm or community, instead of one of these statistics? This paper will give you ten tips on succeeding in private practice.

I. THE STATISTICS FOR WOMEN LAWYERS AREN'T GOOD.

Women are not making partner. The percentage of women in law is increasing, but the percentage of women partners lags far behind. 85% of all partners in law firms are men.

Overall Statistics About Women Lawyers		
	Men	Women
Percent of all U.S. lawyers	71.10%	28.90%
Percent who are partners in law firms	84.37%	15.63%
Percent in managerial and professional specialties other than law	51.50%	49.50%

U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (1999).

Women outside law are doing better than women lawyers are. Outside the legal profession, a full 50% of managers and professionals are women. These numbers hold even though many more women work part time in these other professions.

Percent presently working part-time		
Lawyers	3.20%	
Other professionals	15%	

Id.

According to a University of Colorado study, women lawyers are less likely to be promoted to partner, both and at their first firms and at firms they join later in their careers:

University of Denver Study of Lawyers in Practice 9 Years		
	Men	Women
Promoted to Partner in first firm they entered	25%	18%
Moved to another firm and became partner	42%	24%
Stayed at first firm they entered without being promoted	0%	18%
Left law or became inactive in the profession	0%	18%

Jan Thomas, *Gender Matters*, U. of Denver Mag. (Spring 2005), at www.du.edu/dumagazine/feature_GenderMatters.html.

Women lawyers are not being paid as much. The University of Colorado study showed that even in the year 2000, women attorneys still made 59% of what their male peers did. Thomas, *supra*.

Women lawyers are not happy. A full 49% of women lawyers are not satisfied with their present employers. L. Bodine, *Law firms are losing women lawyers: Lack of mentors and networks cause workplace dissatisfaction* (May 2001), at www.martindale.com/xp/Martindale/Professional_Resources/LegalBiz_Online/Legal_Administration/01_05_3.xml. Women leave their firms on average three years before men do. They “leave because they lack mentors, feel excluded from informal networks within firms, and find it difficult to balance work and personal life.” Bodine, *supra*.

“[M]en overall were 20 percent more likely to be highly satisfied with their compensation, 36 percent more likely to be highly satisfied with opportunities for advancement and compensation, and 18 percent more likely to be highly satisfied with their relationships at work. Women, on the other hand, were 32 percent more likely to have changed firms by their second year of practice and 19 percent less likely to cite new law career opportunities as the reason for their last move.” Thomas, *supra*.

A study of graduates of Ivy League law schools showed that women believe – even more than men – that they have significant barriers to their careers because of family responsibilities, a lack of mentoring, and exclusion from informal networks within organizations.

Catalyst Study of Graduates of Ivy League Law Schools

	Men	Women
Most significant barrier to women's advancement is commitment to family responsibilities	49%	67%
Women are excluded from informal networks within organizations	21%	53%
Women have a lack of mentoring opportunities	29%	52%
Balancing work and life is difficult	66%	68%
I have worked part-time	9%	34%
A major reason for my choice of employer is work-life balance	34%	45%

HRM Guide Human Resources, *US Women lawyers likely to leave employers 3 years earlier than men* (Jan. 2001), at

martindale.com/xp/Martindale/Professional_Resources/

LegalBiz_Online/Legal_Administration/01_05_3.xml..

Surprisingly, although 57% of women reported going to work in-house in order to achieve a better work-life balance, 66% said they had not found it. *Id.*

II. HOW DO YOU AVOID BEING A STATISTIC?

Ten Tips for Women Lawyers.

According to the statistics, women lawyers are less successful, unhappier, and get paid less than men. How do you keep yourself from being one of these statistics? Here are ten tips for women lawyers in private practice.

(1) Realize you are in charge of your own career.

In school, you get handed a list of requirements. Fulfill every requirement, and you will succeed in each class. Succeed in enough classes, and you will get a degree.

Unfortunately, when you leave school, no one hands you a syllabus. For the first time in

life, you are responsible not just for completing the assignments, but for figuring out what they are. Disconcerting as it may be, no one will be watching over your career except you.

(2) Admit you are in a business.

Law schools are designed to teach you the law. Virtually no one mentions that when you come out, you will be an entrepreneur, working in the business of law.

Distasteful as the thought is to most of us, you will be in a business, and your firm will measure you by your financial success.

(3) Plan and set business goals.

You would never invest in a company that had no business goals, and aimlessly set out to sell some product, to someone, somewhere. Why would you invest years of your life without even a minimal plan to get where you want to go?

(4) Decide to market.

According to the book, Getting Down to Business: Marketing and Women Lawyers, women lawyers tend to market less, and less effectively, than men. The book offers several possible reasons:

(a) Women wrongly believe that, if they excel at what they do, they will do well in their firms and automatically will get business.

(b) Women do not realize that there are real, gender problems with getting business, and tend to blame themselves when they do not succeed. Men and women then come to see rainmaking as a male activity.

(c) Women lack confidence in their ability to make rain, and they feel uncomfortable initiating social contacts, and using social contacts, to get business.

- (d) Women are sometimes ambivalent about their jobs or their careers.

Deborah Graham, Getting Down to Business: Marketing and Women Lawyers (1996).

Women do need to market, however, or their jobs will always be at the mercy of the people who do bring in the business.

(5) Learn how to market.

Marketing is not intuitive, at least not to me. Law schools offer next to no information about marketing. You will need to find books and people to tell you how to go about marketing yourself. The book, Getting Down to Business: Marketing and Women Lawyers, gives these tips:

- (a) Overcome the excuse that you do not have enough time. According to the book, many women use time as an excuse to avoid doing what they really don't want to do, anyway. In the long run, you don't have time *not* to market.

- (b) Carefully consider, in each individual circumstance, whether you should try to market solo or as a team. Team marketing may be more effective, and is easier. On the other hand, you may find that in a team context someone else takes the credit for your marketing. At a minimum, make sure you are availing yourself of all of the resources for marketing at your firm.

- (c) Build credentials, but do not assume that credentials alone will get you business.

- (d) Do not over-rely on specialization as a way to avoid marketing.

- (e) Woman-to-woman marketing initiatives may be effective, but the jury is still out.

(6) Market, market, market.

Take what you learned in your reading or through mentors, and put it into practice. Some marketing professionals maintain that you should spend 200 hours a year on marketing, and even then it will take 4 to 6 years before you see full results. Graham, *supra*. Personally, I think those estimates are low.

(7) Find a mentor.

Unless you grew up in a family of lawyers, when you hit the legal scene you likely will not know which directions to take. Mentors can save you a lot of time, by directing you to the most effective and efficient means of developing your legal skills and your practice.

(8) Network with other women lawyers.

If you find yourself in a field of law that is mostly male, seek out other women. Women lawyers have common problems, and can come up with common solutions. Plus, they're a lot of fun.

(9) Recognize your weaknesses, and find someone to fill in those gaps.

Women in solo practice or in small firms bear the responsibility for the business side of the practice, as well as the legal side. If you find you are not good at a particular aspect of business or your practice, *e.g.*, you hate accounting or you are a bad typist, then find someone who can fill in those gaps and let you get on with the job you enjoy, which is practicing law.

(10) When it comes to volunteer organizations, showing up is half the game, but first decide whether you want to play.

Obtaining leadership roles in volunteer organizations is remarkably easy. If you simply show up and perform the slightest task given to you, you are likely to get more serious assignments. In fact, you may need to do less showing up. In her book, Graham warns that women may sabotage their careers by becoming tangentially involved in groups (which is pointless) or by becoming over-involved in organizations that suck time away from the things the women really love or from more effective business-getting efforts.

CONCLUSION

According to the statistics, women are not doing well at law. But *you* can be the counter-statistic.

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