

PUBLICATION

Tips for Professional Women

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Can you tell us about the various leadership positions you have held in your career and how you achieved those positions?

Let's see: I started out as a mentor in law school to younger, diverse law students. I mentored clerks while at Frilot, Partridge. Then, Katrina forced me out of New Orleans and led me to Baker Donelson where I began in labor and employment, then financial services. I started managing the Financial Services Team and its work following the economic downturn. In 2013, I was named as the Mortgage Litigation Group vice-chair, along with Katie Dysart (shout-out!). From 2014 to 2015, I served as a Fellow in the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity, and from 2015 to 2016, I served as the Defense Research Institute Publications chair of the Diversity Committee. I am also co-chair of the Employment Litigation Committee for ABA TIPS.

Frankly, I achieved all of my leadership positions through a combination of hard work and effective networking. If you can nail work ethic with a healthy mix of effective and intentional networking habits, opportunities to participate in leadership positions should be a natural progression.

What are the challenges of being a woman in a senior in-house counsel position?

I don't think the challenge relates necessarily to being a woman in this particular in-house position because I am fortunate that I work with progressive men and have other women on our legal team, and we all are super supportive of one another. I believe one of the biggest challenges I face constantly is adjusting to what my day-to-day will look like due to ever-changing business needs and employment issues that often times need rapid-fire legal responses.

How do you put together your ideal legal team? Does diversity play a role?

First, top-notch legal work/talent is a baseline requirement in any undertaking. I believe it is necessary to analyze each issue at hand separately to determine the desired ultimate outcome. Then, I put together a team that I believe can efficiently and effectively accomplish that desired outcome. Diversity, regardless of the stage in my career, has always been near and dear to me. In developing a legal team, it is not always possible to have a diverse team of players, but I certainly try to be intentional about seeking out diverse individuals and providing access to diverse lawyers when thinking about staffing a matter.

Are there any real "don'ts" when it comes to working your way up the corporate or professional ladder?

A real "don't" for me is to try to be anyone you are not. Authenticity eats strategy for lunch, so worry less about how to be strategic and more about how you can develop a career-building/climbing strategy that truly fits who you are and what you are capable of.

What are the top four pieces of advice you would give to an aspiring female professional?

1. Embrace the power of being a female. You think differently than others, and there is nothing that should cause you to shy away from that.
2. Know your worth. If you don't, there is nothing to encourage others to recognize it.
3. Stay involved in the conversations with decision-makers; in the community; in current affairs; and in your own self-care.
4. Always try to keep your sense of humor, even in the most difficult of times and decisions.

Who is someone whom you admire or has had significant impact on your career and why?

I know you only asked for one person, but I have to give you two. First, as cliché as it may sound, my mother. She is one of the strongest, most encouraging, and smartest women I know. She did not pursue higher education, but she was there with me every step of the way to make sure I had exactly what I needed to pursue my own. She showered me with pride for the smallest accomplishments, and obliged me with a swift kick in the rear when I needed one. That kind of support is immeasurable. The second person I particularly admire is actually a former shareholder at Baker Donelson, Fern Singer. I will never forget the day she interviewed me to work with her. She said, "If you can survive in Iowa for three years being from Alabama, you can do anything and I want to work with you." It made me laugh and also made me realize I had a friend and mentor for life. Fern taught me to speak up for what I needed, to work hard always, and to make myself proud of me first... the rest would follow.