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WOMEN IN THE LAW

AT THE HELM

Perspectives
from lawyers
who lead
their practice
groups.

Leading by Example

By Jamie Wine

The greatest reward I get from being a practice group leader is the opportunity to serve as a role model and mentor to younger attorneys. Even today, while women are prevalent in the legal profession, there are still few examples of women who have a robust full-time practice and are active in firm management, all while raising young children.

Female (and male) associates regularly ask me how to balance a demanding work life with the demands of my 1-year-old and 3-year-old. Often, the questioning associates don't even yet have children, but are trying to anticipate what life will be like down the road. Already feeling overwhelmed at times from the pressures faced at work, they wonder how they will be able to handle the

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added challenge of parenthood. I used to think that the work/life balance question was so cliché, but I now sense the earnestness with which it is asked and fear only that my answers will sound clichéd. So while I struggle to find an

eloquent and insightful response, I take comfort in knowing that at a minimum I can be an example to them.

I am a global co-chair of the securities litigation and professional liability practice group at Latham & Watkins, a position I have held since 2007. The practice, with more than 200 attorneys, is one of the largest in the litigation department at the firm. My responsibilities for the practice group include both external activities (e.g., business development, media relations), as well as internal activities (strategic initiatives, associate development and progression, and training).

Several qualities have helped make me an effective practice group leader. The first is reputation. During my 15-year career at my firm, I have tried to distinguish myself by consistently doing excellent work. I have gained the trust and confidence in my mentors who recognize my commitment and judgment. The second is practice success. I have been handling securities and professional liability matters for almost my entire career and have been involved in some of the firm's most significant cases in this area. I have developed strong relationships with important institutional clients and serve as an internal resource for securities and professional liability questions.

The third is management ability. I bring considerable management experience to my current position. I formerly served as co-head of the firm's Los Angeles litigation department (before moving to New York in 2006) and currently serve on our firm's Associates Committee. These experiences have given me the fundamentals to lead the practice group.

As a parent, one of the primary considerations in being involved in firm management is the impact it will have

on my family life. I handle a full complement of client work in addition to whatever management responsibilities I assume, and I need to ensure that I spend meaningful and quality time with my children. At the same time, I believe that having strong female role models in firm management is very important to the success of the firm, the practice group and for me personally. I am honored to serve in firm management and appreciate the opportunity to give back to my mentors, colleagues and the firm, which has been very good to me.

There is no standard blueprint for success as a woman in a big law firm and, in some respects, we have to work even harder to disprove any lingering stereotypes that women cannot be focused on both their careers and families. We thus need to perform at the highest levels in whatever we do. But it is equally important to recognize and appreciate that female attorneys bring different qualities and perspectives that very much can be an advantage in our practice. Female attorneys change the dynamic in the room (whether it be a courtroom or a boardroom), and can have a positive impact on the way other professionals around them behave.

Female attorneys also change the way lawyers think about managing a law firm. We put more focus on reduced pace programs, leave of absence policies, and other benefits that make the law firm environment more conducive to female (and male) attorneys with children. We recognize the value of mentoring more junior attorneys. We think about different ways to develop business and originate and maintain client relationships. This is why it is so critical for female attorneys to take leadership roles in firm management, despite whatever other demands we have on our time. •