

Female Powerbrokers Q&A: Genova's Kathleen Einhorn



Law360, New York (May 16, 2014, 1:37 PM ET) -- Kathleen Barnett Einhorn is a partner in Genova Burns Giantomasi Webster LLC's Newark, New Jersey, office and director of the firm's complex commercial litigation and public contract law and bid protest litigation practice groups. She concentrates her practice in general commercial litigation and counseling with an emphasis on complex contract and business disputes, fraud or misrepresentation, insurance and employment defense, First Amendment and constitutional rights claims, civil extortion, intellectual property, insurance coverage, defamation, real estate, internet law, construction disputes and public contract and bid protests.

Einhorn is a member of the board of the New Jersey Women Lawyers Association and also serves as a trustee of the Women in the Profession Section of the New Jersey State Bar Association. This year she was listed as one of New Jersey's Super Lawyers' Top 50 Women; in 2013 she was listed as one of the Best Lawyers in America and as a New Jersey Super Lawyer; in 2012 she was named one of NJBiz's Best 50 Women in Business.

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

A: I'm not sure I — or women in my profession generally — have "broken into" the "old boys' network." That implies that this "boys' network" no longer exists, when it most certainly remains intact. While I, and numerous other women before me and alongside me, have worked extremely hard to promote equality and acceptance of women in this profession, the fact is we have only opened the door a crack and we still have a long way to go — and we will get there.

I am confident we will get there through hard work and perseverance; by supporting and mentoring each other and by engaging our male colleagues to support us in breaking the barriers that have been put in place based on gender stereotypes.

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

A: At Genova Burns Giantomasi Webster, I'm fortunate to work with male leaders who are tolerant, compassionate and committed to an environment based upon merit and diversity. Our Inclusionary Initiative, which provides support to women and minority attorneys both internally and to those in community-wide leadership roles, illustrates the priority my partners and I place on increasing opportunities for those who may not have had the same access even 10 years ago.

That said, I don't believe the challenges facing women at senior levels in a law firm are any different from those faced by women starting out in their careers. The stereotypes remain intact at all levels. I am extremely lucky to work with male partners who are in all instances my biggest and loudest supporters, however, it is the subconscious application of gender stereotypes that we need to eradicate. Trying to correct behavior that is not consciously performed is not easy.

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

A: Once, I was attending a professional seminar, and the moderator broke the audience up into small groups. There were four groups, each comprised of four or five men and coincidentally one woman. Each group had to select a "note taker" to record the group's results. I was instructed by the men in my group to take the notes. I initially refused and questioned the men in my group whether they expected me to be the note taker because I was a woman. They told me I was overreacting and being ridiculous. After much debate, I begrudgingly agreed to be our group's note taker.

At the end of the exercise, the moderator asked the note taker for each group to go to the front of the room to share the group's results. Guess who stood up? The woman in every group had been selected to be the note taker. I pointed out to the entire group that this was a clear example of what I call "subconscious sexism." The male participant in my subgroup who had given me a hard time about my push back to being our "secretary" got up and stood with me at the front of the room. He was embarrassed and apologetic for not recognizing this subconscious application of sexism.

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

A: The best advice I can give is "don't fall prey to the notion that you cannot have it all, because you can!" Figure out what you want your career to be. Don't expend useless energy on trying to be something that you think others want, or expect, you to be.

Find mentors, male or female, who will support "your" path, and accept that you do not have to do this on your own. Seek advice from women who have ascended to the highest ranks of the profession — they have all faced the same or similar challenges of balancing work and family life that you will undoubtedly encounter and their guidance will prove to be immeasurable.

Be confident in your abilities, believe in yourself and most importantly, prove your equality and legal abilities through hard work, dedication and loyalty — and, always, always be prepared!

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

A: It starts at the top. The consistent presence and direction of women leaders will inspire inclusion and acceptance of the work life balance which is required to retain successful female lawyers. Implementing an inclusionary initiative, like the one at GBGW, will help retain female lawyers by providing guidance and support. Retention of women is critical because diversity is simply good business. Women increasingly occupy “seats at the table” at the highest-level positions. If a firm wants to represent a wide demographic of potential business prospects, it is in its best interests to promote women, and minorities, not only from an ethical stance, but from a bottom-line perspective.

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

A: Joseph LaSala [of McElroy Deutsch Mulvaney & Carpenter LLP]. I worked for Joe at the beginning of my career and have been lucky enough to have remained in contact with him throughout my career. Aside from providing me with a solid foundation for my legal career, he instilled in me the importance of loyalty and allegiance and remaining a good person in an otherwise cut-throat profession. Joe is one of the most successful lawyers in New Jersey and has achieved that success while remaining a gentleman, a loyal friend and a man of integrity. He is the kind of person I admire and aspire to emulate.

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