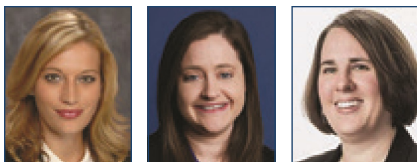


This Week's Feature

Tips, Tools, and Testimonials

Advice on Business Development, Seizing Opportunities, and the Work–Life Balance for Young Women Lawyers

By Jessica Knopp Cunning, Pamela Kaplan, and Kristi Lemanski



After the 2018 DRI Young Lawyers Seminar, and particularly after reflecting on the remarks from Judge

Darleen Ortega from the Oregon Court of Appeals about her path to the bench, we asked some “senior” female DRI Young Lawyers Committee members for their tips, tricks, and thoughts about business development, making equity partner, and generally “making it” in the law firm environment. Below are the responses.

What advice do you have for younger female associates on business development?

- “Stay in touch with your female law school colleagues. There’s a good chance they’ll be in-house counsel someday.”
- “Look for creative business development opportunities with your clients. Don’t be afraid to plan a family outing with kids and other family members.”
- “Do something memorable. You form strong relationships with clients when you are learning something together or sharing a unique experience.”
- “Many industries predominantly have female in-house counsel. Share these observations with your firm’s partners. Eventually, they will see it, too.”
- “Make the most of your DRI experience. Get involved and make actual friends. My female DRI friends are an incredible support network for me.”
- “Take a long-term view. You aren’t going to get clients right away and that is ok. Just focus on putting the stepping stones in place, and the garden will come.”
- “Networking is easier than you think. It can be as simple as staying in touch and having fun with your law school friends. Ten years into my practice I realized (too late) that I had spent those 10 years devoting 2,200+ hours annually to learning the law and learning how to be a litigator. My near-singular focus was becoming a great lawyer. But if you intend to be in private practice, the law is a business and you are in sales. It’s not enough

to be a great lawyer or a great advocate. Assume that there are lots of great lawyers and great advocates. You build your business based on trusted relationships, which take time. Now I look back and think, ‘I wish I had nurtured those intimate, real connections with my law school classmates.’ Many of them are in-house GCs or in positions to make decisions about hiring outside counsel.”

What advice do you have for younger female associates on seizing opportunities?

- “You want to make yourself indispensable to your firm. Recognize the opportunities and don’t be afraid to seize them. All it takes is one big opportunity to transform your career trajectory, but you have to see it, and then you have to go for it.”
- “When it comes to the opportunities that you’re not comfortable seizing, step back and internally analyze why. If it is because you do not have the requisite experience, it’s the imposter syndrome talking. Ignore it. You can only get experience by doing it.”
- “Once you seize an opportunity, be constantly looking for the next one. Show initiative and ownership by telling your partners/superiors that you are doing XYZ unless you are instructed otherwise.”
- “Don’t lean in to someone else’s table; make your own table. Of course you need to play well with others, but don’t feel like you need to speak someone else’s language to succeed. Your ideas are valuable and insightful, albeit, historically underrepresented, which in some ways makes them even better.”

What advice do you have for younger female associates on setting themselves up for equity partnership?

- “Learn the art of inserting yourself quietly but effectively into the areas of work and conversations that you want to be a part of.”

- “Figure out the nuances of your firm’s political structure and use that knowledge to help you strategically make career decisions.”
- “Know that regardless of whether you are working full-time or part-time, you will likely have to push yourself beyond what your requirements are in your two years preceding your partnership nomination.”
- “Find a female mentor and champion. She will prove to be a valuable resource time and time again as you navigate your associate career and prepare for partnership.”

What advice do you have for younger female associates on balancing work and personal life?

- “Whether you are single, have a partner, or have children, fight for your personal life and make space for it. It is a fine balance between showing that you are committed and over-committing yourself to the point of burnout.”
- “Use all of your vacation time. You’ll never look back and say, ‘I wish I worked more.’”
- “Choose not to feel guilty. Like any other mindset, choosing not to feel guilty can be cultivated.”
- “Recognize that perfection is not only an unrealistic goal but a dangerous one, and one that can inhibit your potential and limit your ambitions.”
- “Look at balance as a continuum—you will not be able to be everything to everyone, every day. Carve out some time for you, your family, and your professional development, but do not apologize for loving your work and your career or making sacrifices—it is something clients recognize and appreciate, and it builds your self-worth. Having it ‘all’ can only be defined by you—and what that is changes as you move through various life cycles.”
- “Embrace the calm. Life as a lawyer is hectic and oftentimes it feels like you are getting a solid B- in every aspect of professional and personal life. So when work responsibilities do calm down (they always do!) carve that time out to go to the ball game/recital/do yoga. Don’t beat yourself up for the days you are not there, and always, always be there when you can.”
- “Be honest about your schedule. For some of us, a 7 am meeting is great because the kids are still asleep; for others, it’s impossible because you are smack dab in the middle of your morning routine. Our clients have the same issues. Internally, I tell my team, I can’t be at that 4:45 pm meeting because I have pickup today. To clients,

I say, that time is inconvenient for me but I can make it work if that is what everyone else needs. Of course client’s needs come first, but don’t feel like you don’t have a voice.”

What are your law firms doing effectively to attract, retain, and enable women to succeed within the firm?

- “My law firm is doing more than a diversity or a women’s initiative. I’ve asked, and also pushed, to be included in management meetings where I can offer a female voice and perspective.”
- “My law firm tries really hard to actively mentor female colleagues, and I try to do the same. My firm recognizes that attracting and retaining females are two very different things and that meaningful relationships help women stay in the firm.”
- “My law firm supports my DRI involvement, which is my female support system in many respects.”

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