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MARKETING THE LAW FIRM

MAY 2021

Gender Equity Is Part of DRI's DNA

By Emily G. Coughlin

In the legal community, women are still struggling to achieve equity with their male counterparts. This industry is rife with obstacles, and despite the fact that women are making up an increasingly larger share of equity and nonequity partner positions, [statistics from the Census Bureau still show](#) that male lawyers earn more than female lawyers in every age group and earnings percentile.

As the fourth woman President of DRI, The Voice of the Defense Bar and premier national organization of civil defense lawyers with nearly 20,000 members, I'm proud to say that we're leading the way for women to take hold of leadership positions, setting the standard for other industry organizations to follow suit.

Women In the Law Committee

Almost 20 years ago, Sheryl J. Willert was the first woman and woman of color to serve as President of DRI. In 2010, DRI created its Women in the Law Committee to confront the challenges women face working in the legal field. Since the range of issues encompassed within race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender diversity, age and disability are so broad and historically complicated, a separate effort specific to women is needed to address those particular issues. The Women in the Law Committee is intended to complement DRI's Diversity and Inclusion Committee by promoting separate but distinct goals while fostering collaboration on issues of shared concern.

The goals of the Women in the Law Committee are:

1. Providing leadership opportunities for women who may not have had access to them in other substantive law committees.
2. Integrating new female members into DRI and distributing their talents through other areas of the organization.
3. Setting the stage for successful business referrals.
4. Providing speaking, writing and other thought leadership opportunities.
5. Offering opportunities for personal and professional development through seminars, webcasts and other programs.
6. Involving clients in key committee activities to strengthen client relationships.
7. Expanding our member network locally, regionally and nationally through annual meetings, the Women in the Law Seminar, and local and regional events.

DRI Has the Most Women In Leadership Positions

DRI represents and promotes the accomplishments of women lawyers by putting them into more leadership positions than other legal organization. For the first time in its 60-year history, 50% of DRI's executive committee, 40% of the board of directors and 52% of committee chairs are women.

Currently, more than half of DRI's substantive law committees in some of the most important areas of the law are led by women. These committees are filled with lawyers that represent municipalities, insurers, business and professionals nationwide.

These DRI committees are filled with lawyers representing not only businesses, insurers, professionals, and municipalities nationwide but also some of the largest Fortune 100 corporations leading the tech, pharmaceutical, manufacturing, transportation, healthcare, financial services and energy sectors. More importantly, the women leading these committees are established national leaders in their industries and practice areas. By putting more women in leadership positions, DRI is creating the conditions for other women to assume leadership roles in their respective fields.

This year, DRI is also proud to have Kathleen Guilfoyle chairing one of its flagships committees, The DRI Center for Law & Public Policy (The Center). Through scholarship, legal expertise and advocacy, The Center provides the most effective voice for the defense bar in national discussions of substantive law, constitutional issues and the integrity of the civil justice system. It is a voice that is heard through published research materials, extensive amicus briefs to the U.S. Supreme Court, the DRI National Poll on the civil justice system, practical tools and resources for DRI members, objective counsel to policy makers and creative public education initiatives. The Center's work includes its four primary committees:

1. Amicus Committee
2. External Policy Alliance
3. Issues and Advocacy Committee
4. Legislation and Rules Committee

DRI's Philanthropy Efforts Are Spearheaded By Women

DRI's two initiatives to improve the lives of its members and their communities are both led by women that also happen to be on our board of directors.

DRI for Life, the philanthropy wing focused on improving the lives of DRI members, is led by DRI National Director Sara M. Turner. DRI for Life offers programs and opportunities for members to lead healthy and sustainable lives through work-life balance, exercise, and quality-of-life initiatives, as well as programs supporting mental health and substance abuse issues within the profession.

DRI Cares, which helps members give back to the communities where they work and live by partnering with local service organizations, is led by Rebecca A. Nickelson, who also serves on DRI's board as a Mid Region Director.

Choose to Challenge

This year's International Women's theme, "Choose to Challenge," is intended to remind us that a challenged world is an alert world. So while we celebrate DRI's advancement of women, we must remain alert to the work that must be done to help those who identify as women, women of color, first generation professional women, women transitioning back to the workforce after having children, and women who are just struggling to manage it all.

It is not necessarily gender that differentiates us from our male colleagues — it is the roles that women have been traditionally expected to play in society. Our women members are mothers, caregivers, household managers and “chief consumer officers” of their families in addition to being litigators and often running their own businesses.

In fact, the new women’s movement may be fueled by entrepreneurship. Women over 50 are the second-largest group starting new businesses in the United States. DRI is definitely seeing an increasing number of women starting their own law firms. Women today are also more educated than any previous generation and have the highest percentage of workforce participation when compared to previous generations. For that reason, women are also more likely to be our clients than ever before.

As I reflect on my journey, I credit the many friends, mentors and past leaders who have believed in me and helped me along the way. I have been leaning on each of them for guidance and support since I co-founded Coughlin Betke, LLP in Boston nearly 25 years ago. Rising to the Presidency of DRI and representing nearly 20,000 of the nation’s best and finest civil defense attorneys — almost half of which are women — and the businesses they serve, is frankly something I never would have imagined. I am fortunate to have made and grown friendships in this organization that have remained with me over the years.

Though some improvements have been made in certain areas — the number of women equity partners [increased](#) from 16% in 2007 to 19% in 2017 — there is much more work to do and there are still many hurdles to overcome. According to a report from the National Association of Women Lawyers, women continue to work for lower billing rates than men, 93% of firms’ highest-paid attorneys are men, and most firms said their top ten highest-paid attorneys were men.

I hope our work at DRI empowering women in the legal profession serves as an example to other legal associations. We need to expose more women to governance and leadership positions, giving them the skills and confidence to rise as leaders within their firms and specialty practice areas, as well as the ability to attract, maintain and expand their books of business.

SIDEBAR:

DRI Committees Currently Led By Women

Corporate counsel	Drug & medical device	Governmental liability	Law practice management	Women in the Law
Cybersecurity	Employment	Insurance law	Professional liability	Workers compensation
Commercial	Fidelity & surety	Intellectual property law	Appellate advocacy	Young lawyers

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