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## Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles







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### Generational Perspectives on the State of Women in Law

*Inspired by the many speakers WLALA has presented over the years, we've taken notice that we can all benefit by sharing our experiences, wisdom, ideas and hopes for the future. For the younger generation, it is easy to forget how far we've come and the paths those before us have paved. For the older generation, the focus on work-life balance and the drop-out rate among younger attorneys may seem disappointing. In this "Generational Perspectives" series, WLALA will feature articles written by female attorneys of all ages – from those who have been practicing for more than 35 years to those who recently graduated from law school -- to share their thoughts on how far we've come and where we are headed.*

#### "No Better Time to Be a Woman Attorney -- Especially in California"

by Diana Friedland



At law school in Berkeley, I felt only optimism about my ability to succeed as a female attorney. Thanks in large part to the many trailblazers who came before me and opened so many doors that previously had been closed to women, I felt that the legal world was my oyster. At the time, my classes were nearly half full of outspoken, intelligent women; the Boalt Hall Women's Association created a vibrant, encouraging community of female students supporting one another; and I was fortunate to see my older sister and many other women obtain positions at elite law firms, clerkships with prestigious judges, and coveted placements at well-respected government and non-profit organizations.

When I began my legal career at a top international law firm in 2008, my perspective on being a woman attorney changed. Although my firm expressed commitment to promoting a diverse workplace in terms of hiring women attorneys and offering flexible work schedules, few women were selected for partnership, their careers literally hitting a dead end. I became increasingly concerned that I too could find myself eight years later in a professional limbo.

It was at this same time that I watched my older sister, who just had her third daughter, leave her BigLaw job to hang her own shingle, courageously opening an employment law boutique firm without even one client, just as the economy had tanked. Through sheer hard work and business savvy, in a few short years, she found herself so busy with her practice that she reached out to me to partner with her. It did not take much convincing for me to say yes.

Since we became Bernstein & Friedland, P.C. in May 2011, I have rediscovered the optimism I felt in law school. Without a doubt, there is no better time to be a woman attorney—especially one in California. Studies show that there are more women-owned businesses in California than in the rest of the country,[1] and that women today comprise 30 percent of company general counsel, when only a few years ago the number was closer to 15 percent at those same companies. [2] Additionally, more companies than ever before have expressed their commitment to diversity, including by advertising their interest in retaining certified women-owned law firms to handle their legal matters.

While I occasionally still find myself one of the few women in the courtroom or at networking events, I have embraced these realities rather than become discouraged by them. I have made an effort to establish mentorship relationships with women I look up to, who have provided me invaluable advice in confronting the challenges women attorneys face, such as opposing counsel who treat female attorneys condescendingly or do not take them seriously; mediators who are rumored to intentionally low-ball clients represented by women attorneys, thinking that women lawyers are more likely to persuade their clients to accept low settlement proposals than continue fighting in litigation; and judges with outdated views on women attorneys. I have tried to support my female peers by referring clients to them, making thoughtful introductions for them to potential referral sources or other professionals from whom they can benefit, and by supporting the next generation of female law students and lawyers as they begin their professional careers.

Ultimately, the best thing women lawyers can do for themselves is to not get discouraged by what can sometimes feel like a male-dominated field. We have come this far because of our hard work; our ability to think critically, multi-task, and problem-solve; and our commitment to doing the best we can for our clients. The future is ours to write.

[1]See, "Golden Opportunity for California Women Business Owners," available at <http://scoreoc.org/2012/04/25/golden-opportunity-for-california-women-business-owners/> (last viewed on Oct. 20, 2012).

[2]See, "Women In-House Counsel Achieve Success," available at <http://www.natlawreview.com/article/women-house-counsel-achieve-success> (last viewed on Oct. 20, 2012).

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To read Deborah Crandall Saxe's perspective, [CLICK HERE](#).

\*If you would like to contribute to this series, please contact the WLALA Communications Officer, Amy Brantly at [abrantly@susmangodfrey.com](mailto:abrantly@susmangodfrey.com).

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