

## Female Powerbrokers Q&A: Fish's Cynthia Walden

*Law360, New York (January 02, 2014, 12:02 PM ET)* -- Cynthia Johnson Walden has served as leader of Fish & Richardson PC's trademark and copyright group since 2007. She oversees all of the firm's trademark and copyright cases. Her practice includes all aspects of trademark law, including strategic global counseling on trademark and branding issues, U.S. and foreign prosecution and enforcement, domain name and Internet-related issues, licensing, trademark opposition and cancellation proceedings, and trademark litigation. She also focuses on copyright prosecution and litigation, and has experience with false advertising and unfair competition matters and corporate due diligence.

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

A: I went to college at Dartmouth, so perhaps that helped in that I was accustomed to working in an environment that was historically predominantly male. In all seriousness though, I do not view my experience in college, law school or in law firm life as being overly identified with gender issues or stereotypes. Certainly these issues exist and create obstacles, but I have not spent much time dwelling on them. I have always just focused on the task at hand, being fully engaged in doing a good job, working hard, delivering results, and seeking new opportunities.

I do not identify any particular thing as the key to how I got to where I am today, but I do believe that the key to success is finding something you enjoy doing, working hard to do it well and cultivating relationships with colleagues and clients along the way. I have been fortunate to work at a firm that is open-minded and encouraging about having me take on a leadership role.

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

A: I believe many of the challenges of being at a senior level within a law firm are the same, whether you are male or female, including juggling the demands of numerous matters and responsibilities, administrative issues and managing a team. Being a woman at a senior level within a firm means that you have figured out some strategies for negotiating these challenges, but those inevitably will be different for each woman. For many women like myself, there are also the ever-evolving challenges of successfully balancing work and family, which requires having the ability to focus on what should be prioritized on any given day, having the flexibility to reprioritize when necessary, and having a reliable team to help ensure everything gets done well.

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

A: I have been fortunate in that I have not had to deal with much overt sexism in my career. I can certainly recall encountering opposing counsel in matters earlier in my career who acted as though they were superior and were in some ways disdainful in their communications on the basis that I was a junior female attorney. But I have found that prevailing in the matter is the best response to such offensive tactics! Focusing on the matter at hand and getting to where you need to be should always be the focus. Getting side-tracked by acknowledging or responding to this type of behavior is perhaps their goal and should be avoided unless the behavior is so egregious that it needs to be called out for what it is and the message is clearly sent that it is inappropriate.

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

A: My advice to aspiring female attorneys is to (1) identify your goals, (2) develop a strategic game plan of how to get the right experiences and training to get you where you want to be, (3) build a relationship with a mentor who can help provide guidance and perspective, (4) seek opportunities to demonstrate and expand your skills, (5) focus on delivering efficient and high quality work, and (6) be attentive and responsible to your clients and colleagues alike. I would also encourage aspiring female attorneys to make an extra effort to network and expand your relationships within your company/firm as well as in the community at large.

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

A: I have known many talented and successful women over the years who left law firm jobs due to the need and/or choice to prioritize taking care of their families. Many times women make the decision to move in-house, which is perceived as having a more accommodating lifestyle, though sometimes the decision has been to step back from the practice of law entirely. While everyone has a personal choice to make on that front, there are some things law firms can do to minimize the loss of talented women attorneys and position themselves to have an increased number of women in the partner ranks.

The law firms that are most successful in retaining and promoting women in the partner ranks are those that foster an atmosphere of open-mindedness and who recognize the value of cultivating a diverse group of attorneys. Fundamentally this means developing and maintaining a culture that inspires talented female attorneys to stay and believe they will have a real opportunity to be elevated to the partner ranks if they do so. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, but at the core this means providing equal opportunities for young male and female attorneys to work on important and challenging matters.

Another thing firms can do is encourage senior attorneys (both male and female) to take on the role of mentoring junior female attorneys and to help them develop the skills and relationships that will help them succeed.

Beyond that, law firms that implement and support diversity initiatives and women's networking activities increase the likelihood that women will feel encouraged to embrace the challenges of a long-term career at a firm.

Finally, having flexibility with schedules (without lowering standards for work quality or timeliness) will enable some female attorneys to juggle the challenges of work and family more successfully and encourage them to stay in for the long term.

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

A: Kirstan Barnett who is general counsel and partner at Bracebridge Capital LLC. I have known Kirstan for 15 years, from when she was a senior associate in the corporate practice at Testa Hurwitz, through her transition to Bracebridge. Kirstan has always impressed me with her savvy intelligence, her positive demeanor and her enthusiasm for seeking and embracing new challenges. Most recently, in her free time, Kirstan founded a charitable organization in Boston called SheGives, which is designed to provide and channel charitable giving by women to a variety of philanthropic entities in the Boston area.

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