

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DRI WOMEN IN THE LAW CHAIR LANA A. OLSON

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The DRI Women in the Law Committee has been chaired for the last two years by Lana A. Olson, a partner at Lightfoot, Franklin & White, LLC. Her chairmanship ended in October 2015, when she turned her gavel over to Heidi Friedman, a partner at Thompson Hine LLP. Recently, Lana took the time to sit down with me and talk about the Committee, its history, its present and future, as well as its purpose and goals.

The Women in the Law Committee (“WITL”) of DRI officially came into being five years ago due to a strong commitment by DRI to foster the advancement of women in the profession, more importantly, to create a place where women can obtain the tools to deal with issues that are unique to them. As Lana explains, the Committee grew out of the Sharing Success Seminar, which began in the

1990s, disappeared after a few years, and was resurrected by a new group of women in the 2000’s. The response to the Sharing Success Seminar was so amazing that these dedicated women decided there needed to be more than a once-a-year seminar because, as great as it was, there was a void that needed to be filled. DRI gave its blessing to start this stand-alone Committee in early 2010 which is considered a “broad range committee,” since it cuts across every type of practice area.

Although the mission statement of the Women in the Law Committee has been refined since its inception, it can best be described now as a network for women lawyers that includes professional and personal development. In essence, it is about helping women lawyers succeed. Its goal is to be a positive influence and a connection for women lawyers. The Committee focuses on the positives, while acknowledging the negatives that affect women in the profes-

sion. What makes this Committee different is the fact it does not encourage the defeatist mentality; rather, it serves as a guidepost for ideas to overcome the issues that women lawyers often face. For example, the WITL Committee provides education, training, mentoring and information-sharing about how women can become better lawyers, better businesswomen, develop more business, and tackle internal challenges within their firms or companies (succession planning, origination credits, etc.).

One thing the WITL Committee does not want to be is an organization limited to women lawyers, despite its focus on them. It is important to have men as part of the conversation, because, as Lana says, “frankly some of the changes necessary in the profession cannot change just by women working on the issues.” The WITL Committee is far from an exclusive “sorority,” but rather a place where both genders are welcome, and their feedback is important. There are

a number of men who are members of the WITL Committee, such as John Trimble, a partner at Lewis Wagner LLP. As the chair of the Law Practice Management Committee, John has been involved in multiple areas of the WITL Committee and is an outspoken advocate of the importance of the WITL Committee to him as a male attorney (and father of a female lawyer). The WITL Committee is focused on helping women succeed, and both men and women need to be involved in that conversation together for that to happen.

As chair of the Committee, Lana was involved in multi-day leadership conferences within DRI and established great connections with other Committee leaders within the organization. Through these connections, Lana was able to help foster leadership opportunities for WITL members in other substantive committees and DRI boards during her two-year tenure. Lana sees lots of opportunities for the DRI Committees to connect and coordinate to help promote women within the organization. One of the key goals of the WITL Committee is to help provide leadership opportunities, not just within the WITL Committee, but in other areas within DRI as well. Two years ago, the WITL Committee started a Promotion and Leadership subcommittee whose function is to identify and promote great women, not only to the WITL leadership, but to other Committees and Boards. The purpose is to help WITL members obtain leadership skills, get leadership training, meet other DRI leaders, and plan a pathway for whatever it is they want to do.

Although the WITL Committee can help women with leadership skills and opportunities, the Committee is in and of itself a valuable asset to women lawyers for business development. There are not only business referrals within the WITL Committee community through a referral directory that is open only to members of the Committee, but also a community page that comes out daily via e-mail. There is a Rainmaker's Corner weekly post that is a staple on the community page providing links to articles on business development as well as practical advice from successful rainmakers. In addition, the Committee sponsors free quarterly teleconferences called "Opportunity Calling" that address in depth issues that can assist with business development and networking skills, such as how to use your LinkedIn account more effectively, communication skills for lawyers, negotiation skills, and how to run a business, to name just a few.

In addition to the daily community page and quarterly teleconferences, every year in February, the WITL Committee holds a seminar to provide complete immersion into the issues important to women in the profession. Over 300 women from all over the country attend this annual seminar, which will be held in Scottsdale,

Arizona, on February 17-19, 2016, at the Omni Moteluccia Resort & Spa. This year, there will be great topics, including an interactive presentation and workshop by Patricia Gillette, a partner at Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe, along with several great rainmakers and in-house counsel on how to be a better rainmaker. There will also be a multi-part session on damages, with in-house counsel discussing setting reserves and the internal wrangling that goes on when a complaint is filed and strategy on how to deal with damages

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at trial. The discussion will include in-house counsel from Walmart and CNA, as well as several other seasoned trial lawyers. Nationally-known scholar and women's advocate, Joan Williams, a professor at UC Hastings College of the Law, will be presenting on the issue of unconscious bias, an issue that no lawyer, male or

female, should ignore. Other sessions will deal with succession planning and leadership and executive development.

WITL's future plans include the creation of a toolkit to assist State and Local Defense Organizations (SLDOs) with creating, maintaining or improving their women's committees. As part of this project, WITL is presently putting together a comprehensive list of women speakers on a variety of topics that will provide these local organizations with vetted women speakers and topics that are ready for their own seminars. The ability to record and have a podcast on various topics is already in the works for the near future, with research already being conducted to identify topics that the members want to hear. These are just a few of the great things that are in store for the members of the WITL Committee. There are wonderful things on the horizon for the WITL Committee. I am excited to be a part of this Committee and to have the opportunity to work with some spectacular women lawyers, all pushing other women to greatness.

Please consider becoming involved with us. If you would like to get involved with the WITL Committee, please contact Lindsey Mignano at Lindsey.Mignano@clydeco.us. If you need more information about the upcoming seminar in February, please contact Kelly Williams (kwilliams@psmn.com), Kirsten Small (ksmall@nexsenpruet.com), or Janet Hickson (jhickson@shb.com). And, thank you, Lana, for all your hard work and devotion to women lawyers.



Pat Trombetta is currently a shareholder in Smith, Rolfe & Skavdahl Co. LPA and joined this multistate Insurance Defense firm in 1997 after having practiced with a sole practitioner and in-house for insurance carriers. She is a graduate of University of Kentucky College of Law and is licensed in Kentucky, Ohio, West Virginia and Illinois, including the Federal Courts in those jurisdictions as well as Washington D.C. She focuses her practice on Casualty and Property defense and investigations, coverage and extra contractual claims. She also manages the Northern Kentucky and Louisville offices for the firm and is a frequent speaker on insurance related subjects.