

Daily Journal

COVER STORY

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Top Women Litigators

Leaps of Faith

Editor's Note

This year, we asked our honorees to consider a single turning point in their careers, a moment when success hinged on abandoning the familiar for the unknown.

Maybe it was forgoing a potentially lucrative career in another field. Perhaps it was diverging from a family practice to pursue a government job. Or it could have been assuming the lead chair in a complex trial.

As could be expected, the answers varied widely. But the message was clear. Most if not all of these remarkable women faced a point in their lives when doubt was the enemy, a moment that required unwavering faith in their abilities or judgment.

In many cases, sheer determination spawned a revelation or opportunity. It was clear: These advocates have achieved great success by confronting the unknown.

But the exercise also created a sort of blueprint, a road map for generations rising through the ranks of the legal profession.

Some of our honorees said their journeys had nothing to do with leaps — of faith or otherwise.

"The question is, 'Can I prove it?'" explained Los Angeles defense attorney Gigi Gordon. "A leap of faith is antithetical to the entire legal process, as it requires acquiring a belief without any empirical support."

Of course, many of our honorees continue to grapple with not just leaps into the unknown, but moving through all-too-familiar terrain. Studies continue to show that women still account for less than 20 percent of all law firm partners. At the same time, they are jumping off the track to partnership at far higher rates than their male counterparts.

Indeed, though we like to think otherwise, equality between the sexes remains largely a myth. After all, how do we explain the fact that women abandon the pursuit of partnership largely

Lori Schechter

San Francisco

Place of Birth: New York

Law School: Yale Law School

Law Firm: Morrison & Foerster

Practice Area: Class-action defense and antitrust

Years in Practice: 19

Lori Schechter's most recent big victory came in December, when a Sacramento federal judge ruled that California laws forbidding companies such as Lenscrafters from offering eye examinations and eyewear in the same location violate the U.S. Constitution's Commerce Clause.

Schechter represents the optical chains as well as the National Association of Optometrists and Opticians, which challenged the state law. She also represented GlaxoSmithKline Healthcare in a settlement of false-advertising claims involving a cold-sore remedy for \$500 million.

Schechter is stepping down as Morrison & Foerster's firmwide chair of litigation, a position she held for four years. She kept busy in 2006, racking up the most billable hours in years during her time spent on the optometrist and GlaxoSmithKline cases, among others.

Her "leap of faith" involved juggling her management responsibilities as the youngest chair of the firm's litigation department while continuing to handle multiple cases.

"The management role required me to build consensus across generations, offices and practice groups, to get to know and attempt to lead groups of associates and partners toward the same goals, and to speak in public forums and to the press more often than I ever had," she said.

— Craig Anderson



because they are too busy juggling the duties of child care. Forget Mr. Mom — Women still rule the roost.

As a result, the path to success is often fraught with gender-specific hurdles.

Today's challenges remind us that bridging the gap between the known and the unknown

requires courage and tenacity. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the following pages, where many of the state's top women litigators shared those defining moment in their careers, when they leaped into the unknown purely on the belief, as so many of them told us, "that I could do it."

— Dan Schechner