

3 BigLaw Women Who Shattered The Glass Ceiling This Year

By **Cristina Violante**

Law360, New York (April 19, 2016, 9:16 PM ET) -- Only 18 women are among the roughly 150 people at the highest levels of leadership at the 100 largest U.S.-based law firms, according to Law360 data.

Defying that trend are three women who took the helm of their BigLaw firms in the last 12 months: Anne Davis, co-managing partner of Arnold & Porter LLP; Tessa Schwartz, firmwide managing partner of Morrison & Foerster LLP; and Betty Temple, chair and CEO of Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice PLLC.

They rose to the top of their firms in an environment where female attorneys make up only 22 percent of the total partners and 19 percent of the equity partners in the 300-plus firms surveyed in Law360's Glass Ceiling report.

And the numbers thin moving up the ranks. Only 18 women at 17 firms currently hold top leadership positions at the 100 largest firms on the Law360 400, according to Law360 research. Last year, women only held 15 such positions.

Similarly, only 22 percent of the seats on a typical firm's highest U.S. governance committee are held by women, according to a National Association of Women Lawyers report released in November.

While these numbers indicate a systemic failure in the industry to address female underrepresentation in leadership, Davis, Schwartz and Temple say key aspects of their firms' culture enabled them to reach top leadership positions. Here, they discuss what they see as the prerequisites to leadership and how to create a symbiosis between firms and talent.

Anne Davis, Co-Managing Partner of Arnold & Porter



"I decided early on in my career that A&P was not going to simply be a workplace for me," Davis told Law360.

"There was something genuine and energizing about the history and culture of the firm that made me willing to devote extra time and energy beyond my casework to firm committees and other endeavors," she said.

Davis says that this decision propelled her to start taking on firm administration, in addition to litigation. "I'm a people person, and I looked for ways that I could be helpful within the firm," she said.

At Arnold & Porter, Davis had the opportunity to take on numerous leadership roles, including "serv[ing] on the firm's hiring committee, partnership election committee, management committee, policy committee and in the firm's general counsel function."

Beyond these roles, though, Davis considers her personal relationships at the firm "to be the single most important factor in my success."

Like Schwartz and Temple, Davis credits her mentors, and not just practical experience, for where she is today. These mentors, Davis said, "support[ed] me throughout my career by affording me opportunities to lead on issues I was passionate about, in my own way, not only allowing me to be myself but encouraging me to do so."

"This has always been a place where I felt comfortable speaking up and expressing my views, both on client teams and on firm issues," she said.

This comfort and ability to do things her own way, Davis says, is part of a "culture of openness" at Arnold & Porter that she is "committed to continuing to foster" as co-managing partner.

"That culture of openness — that allows you to speak up and challenge and encourage change — allows people to blossom professionally and results in tremendous loyalty and collegiality among our attorneys and staff," she said.

Openness to change shows in Arnold & Porter's Children's Center, a full-time accredited day care and preschool that was established over 20 years ago. Davis says the center enabled her to "thrive during a phase of a new parent's career that I think for many people can feel overwhelming."

"The Children's Center also has a spillover effect on the rest of the firm," she said. "It sets the tone and speaks clearly about the firm's concern for family issues and its commitment to retaining talented women and working parents."

Tessa Schwartz, Firmwide Managing Partner of Morrison & Foerster



As the former co-chair of MoFo's global technology transactions group and firmwide managing partner, Schwartz says that the most important experience is often "that moment where you have to take an opportunity you may not feel ready for."

"[Women] often like to be 100 percent certain that they're going to make a home run when they take something on," Schwartz told Law360. "That's not the way the world works. Often you get the opportunity before you're ready and you have to have faith in yourself."

"Along the way we've all done fundamental things to demonstrate that we have the talent, vision and strategy, and if someone asks you to do something you can probably do it," she said.

For Schwartz, much of this willingness to take on the new comes down to the concept of flexibility — something that she sees as being at the heart of her job, and of her firm's support for her. "Flexibility is

broad enough to cover the flexibility of your time, and being flexible about at what point you can take on the next challenge, and flexible about what next you want to do."

MoFo has always supported her, she says, in part by encouraging that kind of flexibility. In addition to taking on leadership positions, Schwartz has had the opportunity to switch from litigation to transactional work, take on intense roles in both those fields, and to be made partner while on maternity leave.

Flexibility is not, however, solely about offering women reduced schedules, she says. "We tend to conflate women into this one bucket of the working mother and try to solve all problems around that," Schwartz said, "but I think that all women do not follow one path."

Schwartz believes that firms best empower their attorneys by "doing what it takes to makes them feel they can be successful," not by taking a one-size-fits-all approach.

While the issue might be time for one attorney, another might be in need of certain experience, such as trial work, she says. "It's figuring out what motivates somebody and what's holding them back."

"This is a great job for women," Schwartz said. "You are generally your own boss. You have some flexibility to schedule around things. ... It starts out hard, but the longer you do it, the easier it gets because you have autonomy and flexibility."

"You're in an environment that is supportive and has your back," she added. "That's a great job."

Betty Temple, Chair and CEO of Womble Carlyle



When Betty Temple saw a gap in leadership, she took the initiative to create that role — and fill it.

"We had no leadership on the securities team," Temple explained to Law360. "We had a process and an administrative team, but it wasn't client- or business-focused. I realized there was a void in leadership and that someone needed to lead this team, and I just decided I would create the team."

And that is when Temple formalized and became the head of Womble Carlyle's Public Companies Advisers Team in 2013.

As the head of PCAT, she said, "we decided that our results needed to be visible. We prepared a report for the partnership, who didn't even know we had created the team. It started changing the way people think about leadership in our firm."

"I didn't have to get permission," she said. "We set goals and objectives and were successful ... and that is what catapulted me into the position I'm in today."

As chair and CEO of the firm since Jan. 1, Temple is now in a position to lead by example and set the tone for her firm. That has meant instilling two key principles in male and female attorneys: taking the initiative and making yourself visible.

The other aspect of Temple's approach is instilling a culture of sponsorship in the firm, which "isn't specific for women."

She recognizes that for each attorney who reaches partnership, "there were partners along the way who gave them a client or made a sacrifice."

At this year's firm dinner honoring new equity partners, Temple uncorked the champagne for the sponsors, not the new partner additions. The evening included a video with interviews of new partners, giving them an opportunity to say thank you for the sacrifices that had been made for them.

"Hopefully these new partners will be inspired to do exactly the same," she said. "I'm trying to celebrate that behavior."

Beyond this, Womble Carlyle has grown gender diversity in its leadership ranks by "throw[ing] out traditional law firm ideas about tenure."

"Because of that our vice chair is a woman, our executive committee is 50 percent female, our elected firm management committee is one-third female. A third of the remaining leadership positions are women," she said. "I'm very proud that we've been able to do that."

Methodology: Law360 surveyed over 300 U.S. firms, or vereins with a U.S. component, about their overall and female headcount numbers as of Dec. 31, 2015. Only U.S.-based attorneys were included in the survey.

--Editing by Mark Lebetkin and Catherine Sum.

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