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**Keynote Address**

**Becoming the Women Leaders We Need**

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Good morning. It's very exciting for me to be here today. There is nothing I enjoy more than being in a room full of smart, interesting women! I want to thank Stephanie Richards, Kate Dickinson, and the other organizers at the Women's Law Students Association for inviting me. It looks like a great program with fabulous speakers, and I am looking forward to being with you all and learning a lot today.

In reflecting on what I wanted to share with you today, I was clear that I wanted to have an upbeat message. And while I do feel encouraged looking out at the fabulous women in this room, I am also reminded of how little has changed for women in leadership roles since I was a law student. And, of course, I expect each of you to become leaders in your field.

So what I really want to talk about is why I think that is the case, and what I think you each can do to impact and change this. My generation has clearly not succeeded at achieving anything approaching real gender equality in the workplace – particularly at senior levels – and while we will certainly keep slogging away, this effort will largely be left in your hands.

It is true that the world is a very different place than it was for my mother, who was accepted in a math PhD program at Columbia after graduating from Barnard in 1950, but had to

turn it down because she wanted to marry my dad, and the PhD program took only unmarried women.

It is even a very different place than it was when I was in junior high in the late 1960s and was told I could not take carpentry, but had to take home economics – though that turned out for the best, as I love to cook to this day!

Yet recognizing the enormous progress that women have made in achieving gender equality, women have still not advanced into leadership positions at the rate they should have given the number of women graduating from colleges and law schools over the past 30 years.

In the early 1980s, women equaled men as college graduates, and by the mid-1980s, law school graduating classes were close to 50% women. Yet more than 25 years later, women represent only 19.5% of partners in law firms nationally and, according to the most recent survey by the National Association of Women Lawyers, released last October, women account for barely 15% of equity partners, a percentage that is largely unchanged since 2006.

And the legal profession is not alone. Women's representation at the highest levels of business – as executive officers and in the boardroom – has also been stagnant at around 15% for many years. The percentages of women running non-profits, in tenured academic positions, and in the most prestigious roles in the medical profession, are almost as bad. The White House Project's 2009 Benchmarking Report found that women in leadership positions across 10 fields averaged only 18%.

I was raised, like many women of my generation to believe that I could do anything. I came of age in a world where changes in laws and attitudes seemed to be occurring every day – Title IX was passed when I was finishing high school, Roe v Wade was decided when I was in college. It seemed like all the barriers my mother faced were falling daily. After that home

economics incident at the age of thirteen, I never really felt that I was treated any differently than the guys around me, and assumed that the “blind grading” I had benefitted from in law school would carry over into the workplace.

And, to be fair, I did not notice a huge shift when I entered the permanent workforce in 1980. Sure, I was often only the woman on a deal team of bankers and lawyers. And, yes, I did occasionally confront a pin-up of the flight attendants from the road show jet at a closing dinner - perhaps not totally appropriate for a mixed professional audience, but I just figured “boys will be boys.” More important to me, I was getting good, cutting edge work, enjoying my colleagues and clients, working in foreign offices and keeping up my international travel, and, in fact, I eventually reached my then goal and made partner.

So interestingly – and still somewhat surprising to me – my first real “ah ha” moment came when I walked into my first partners meeting in 1989 and encountered a room full of men. Me – the daughter of a PhD sociologist (my mom did eventually get that PhD) who was used to family dinner conversations where words like “power structures” were the norm – you would have thought I might have noticed that the people making the decisions about my life were virtually all men. But with my head down at my desk, working away, that had just not occurred to me.

And what I slowly realized as I moved through my early partnership years, and saw one woman after another – always for an apparently good reason at the time – not make it over the finish line of partnership while many men did, was that that having this very male power structure was impacting women’s chances to make it to the top and become leaders in the legal profession and elsewhere in the world. Even with everyone’s good intentions – and good

intentions there certainly were – women were getting side-lined more often than men, and it was happening pretty consistently across the board.

I think that the principal problem for many years was that all of us – women as well as men – assumed that time alone would change the numbers at the top. And the good news is that today management in more and more law firms, corporations and other institutions realize that this is not true, and that more conscious and intentional efforts must be made to ensure that women stay on course and become leaders. Lots of policies, programs and even laws have been discussed and many put in place – from flex time and mentoring programs at law firms and corporations to quotas for women on corporate boards in a number of European countries – all designed to increase the number of women in leadership positions.

These strategies at the macro institutional level are certainly critical to achieving lasting change. But what I want to discuss in the remaining time I have with you this morning are not these macro strategies, but rather the things each of you can do as individuals to ensure that you become a leader in whatever legal field you choose.

I personally care deeply about your future as leaders because I truly believe that only when women are at the highest levels of government, business, the law, and every other field – participating in decision-making in equal numbers with men – will we be able to achieve real equality for all women and men wherever they are in society.

So, here are three things that I think you can do to help you become the women leaders we so desperately need for the next generation:

*First*, find your passion and be ambitious in your pursuit of it;

*Second*, be visible, speak up and be sure people see your talents and successes; and

*Third*, make and nurture connections.

***FIRST, FIND YOUR PASSION AND BE AMBITIOUS IN YOUR PURSUIT OF IT***

Find a job that makes you want to get up in the morning, that energizes you and engages you intellectually or emotionally. Find a job where you can foster your ambitions and where you want to reach the top. I was very affected by Sheryl Sandberg (the COO of Facebook)'s commencement address at Barnard last May. Her first message to that graduating class was to “think big,” to “pick your field and ride it all the way to the top”. She noted how studies showed that, in the US college-educated part of the population, men were more ambitious than women, and stated: “*We will never close the achievement gap until we close the ambition gap.*” Those words really resonate with me.

As one gets older, one's life tends to become more complicated – with a spouse, children, aging parents – balancing all one does can be tough. If you are not doing something you love – something that is challenging and rewarding – dropping out of the workforce, or curtailing your ambition to manage the multiple demands on your time, can be pretty attractive. To give up a job so you can pick up your kids from school every day will seem much more appealing if you are bored, or unsatisfied, or not advancing at work. And, believe me, it can be hard to resist a charming 8-year old who is telling you that she is the *only* one who does not get picked up by her mom – which was my daughter's line at that age. Even if not true, it gave me many guilt-ridden nights, and it would certainly have been harder to resist if I had not been going to a job I really enjoyed.

My daughter is now 24 and a successful arts journalist in New York. We are very close, and for many years now, she has been very supportive and proud of me – which I am thrilled about. But just to prove that kids have not changed, a client told me a few days ago, when I was trying to make a lunch date with her, that her 9-year old son had announced to her that he knew

just what she should give up for Lent – *work!* Kids do not make it easy, but they do grow up to appreciate all you do. You just have to wait it out.

Life decisions are very personal, and I am certainly not one to make judgments about other people's life choices. I am sure that, for some of you, leaving the workforce may well be the right decision at some point in your career, as it has been for some of my friends and colleagues. But it is very important that you appreciate that once you leave the workforce, *the barriers to re-entry are enormous*. I have seen too many female friends and colleagues – women who have achieved great success at everything they have done – believe that, *because* they have been so successful, they will be able to re-enter the workforce after a few years off. But this is sadly just not true, particularly in difficult economic times and particularly given the rapid advances of technology and demands for specialized expertise in every field. The result has been a tremendous brain drain, and is one reason for today's dismal statistics about women in leadership positions.

While we are touching on work-life balance (a term I hate, but that's another topic), I thought I would relate the response of New York Times columnist, Gail Collins, when asked what was the most important piece of advice she would give young women today to ensure their success. Her answer: *choose the right partner*. A partner who is really, truly supportive of your career (not just grudgingly tolerant), and views your career as equally as important as his, is indeed critical, as many successful woman will tell you. But I suspect that there is not a guy out there – or at least I hope not many – who would say he does not support his spouse pursuing her career. So you need to really understand what that means when push comes to shove. Choosing the right life partner is of course very important for one's happiness in so many ways – but this is one way in which it is critical.

But let's return to you finding your passion. How do you go about doing that? For one thing, you need to be brutally honest with yourself about what you are good at and what you enjoy. I love my day job – I love helping my clients figure out how to finance and grow their businesses. I love doing cutting-edge deals that I can read about in the paper. And I feel very lucky and fortunate to have landed where I did, since it was certainly *not* planned.

When I graduated from law school in 1980, I had no idea what I wanted to do other than “international work” in some vague and undefined way – and, to be honest, I probably really just wanted someone to fund my international travel! I fell into financing work as the easiest way to do international work in a world where little was global other than the movement of money. I had always assumed that my corporate life would last for a couple of years, and then I would move on to a governmental or NGO job in the international development space.

But, much to my surprise, I found that I had landed in a dynamic, ever-changing field that engaged me intellectually and allowed me to stay connected to the macro international issues of growth and development that had long interested me. And I also had to admit that I was pretty good at the drafting, and liked the client stuff too, and it felt good to be doing something I was good at. But to get to that point meant that I had to reassess the goals and strategies I had when I left law school.

And this is something I have had to do over and over again to ensure I stayed happy and engaged at work. After awhile, as interesting as my day job was, it was not enough for me. I found over time that I was happiest and most productive at work if I found some time each week to engage in the gender equity issues I had also become passionate about – though the amount of time I have invested in this has varied tremendously over the years.

Early in my career, that work often took the form of mentoring women colleagues in the firm and doing *pro bono* work for women-owned small businesses. These days, I have been able to integrate my interests in women in leadership through active board service with a variety of organizations which seek to empower women in different spaces: Legal Momentum (the oldest U.S. advocacy group in for the rights of women and girls), DirectWomen (an ABA and Catalyst initiative to get more women lawyers on corporate boards) and the Global Fund for Women (the largest grant-making organization to women's rights groups around the world) – each of which I could talk to you about for hours as well.

Finding the way to integrate these passions in my day job has given me a tremendous amount of energy and purpose. It has helped me inspire others. It has actually helped me become more successful and a leader in my firm and in the legal profession.

Sometimes finding your passion may take awhile, and sometimes it may involve multiple paths, with some twists and turns. But it is worth staying the course and figuring it out, even if it involves changes to what you see today as your career and your future.

### ***SECOND, BE VISIBLE, SPEAK UP AND BE SURE PEOPLE SEE YOUR TALENTS AND SUCCESSES***

This issue of “visibility” was brought home to me the first year I was up for partner. I did not make it, and was pretty devastated. Yes, it is true that the market had crashed the day before, and only one of my peers made it. But still, I was surprised – shocked actually – so I went to the managing partner and asked what had happened. He told me: “You are just not visible enough.” I asked what that meant, and what I should do. He just repeated his words: “You are just not visible enough.” I had no idea what he was talking about then, but I sure do now.

As I have experienced with myself and seen with many of my female colleagues, women are just not good at speaking up about their strengths, talents and successes – they are just not good at promoting themselves and blowing their own horn. Often this is because they do not really believe in themselves and are unwilling to own their success. Women often attribute their success to others, or to “dumb luck,” or at most to hard work – but rarely to their talents or abilities, as I must say, most men do.

I definitely share this gender trait. For many years, my greatest fear was that someone would discover that my LSAT score (which was strangely far better than any of my SAT or GRE scores) was a mistake, and somehow my whole life would unravel – I would have to drop out of law school or be fired from Simpson. Irrational, I know, but I just could not bring myself to believe in the mounting evidence of my success. And, to be completely honest, I still often describe myself as an accidental leader, even though I know that sounds pathetic and is not really accurate. So I do understand that being able to own one’s success is not easy.

Another real issue women face is that they are often not brought up to be self-promoting. It is true no one likes anyone who is boastful – male or female. And it is also true that studies have shown that being self-promoting in ways that are perfectly acceptable for men can be viewed as pushy or inappropriate in women. Many of you may be familiar with the Harvard Business School case study about Heidi Roizen – a real person and a successful venture capitalist in the Silicon Valley. In 2005, a Stanford Business School professor, Frank Flynn, who was interested in gender stereotypes, made one change to the case for half his class on organizational behavior: he changed Heidi’s first name to Howard. He then asked the class to rate their impressions of Heidi/Howard online. Everyone thought Heidi and Howard were equally competent and equally effective, but they did not like Heidi, they did not want to work with

her. The more assertive they thought Heidi was, the more harshly they judged her, though the same was not true for Howard. So while it is important to be able to talk about your talents and successes, there is a thoughtful and savvy line to walk.

The problem is that you can be the smartest person in the room, and you can be the best at what you do, but if you just sit in your office doing it, *no one will know*. Again, for women, who frequently have multiple responsibilities and limited time, often all we want is to get the work done and get home to our other jobs. But you need to take time to let people know what you do and that you are good at it, and that you have been successful - even if it feels awkward or outside of your comfort zone. And it *is* important to let people know that you really want that partnership, or that promotion, or that job.

I regularly advise mid-level associates who want to make the push for partner to ask the partners with whom they work what those partners did to become successful and, in that context, ask for advice about what the associate should do. With this approach, they can let key people around them know of their ambition in a low key, but generally pretty effective, way. This approach may also allow them to develop needed sponsors who are able to champion them more broadly and aggressively than they are able to do directly.

It is particularly important *for women* to speak up about their ambitions and goals because the unconscious gender bias that women are not as committed as men is, sadly, a bias that affects us all.

I always assumed that everyone around me knew I wanted to be partner – really, why on earth would I be working so hard otherwise?! But you would be surprised. I actually sat through a meeting when I was a young partner where an older male colleague said out loud: “But women don’t really want to be partners, do they?” To give my other male colleagues credit,

their jaws dropped as far as mine in response to this comment, but it did point to a largely unspoken bias that women often care more about other things than their career success.

Another line I still hear with far too much regularity when discussing women and their ambition is: “I’m just not sure how committed she is” – a question that I have *never* heard when discussing a man. And I have heard this question asked about women who do not have children, and even about those who are not married.

In thinking about this issue, I recalled an important McKinsey study released last April, titled “Unlocking the Full Potential of Women in the US Economy.” It focused on the critical need to move female middle managers into senior positions, and the challenges those women faced. Among other “insidious and difficult to address problems,” the study noted “*a tendency to reward men for their potential but women only for their performance.*” It is this unconscious bias that women are not as committed as men that often drives a need for women to prove themselves and perform in ways that men are often not required to.

So, speak up, let your mentors, colleagues and friends know what you do, what you have accomplished, and what you want, and enlist their support to help you get there.

### ***THIRD, MAKE AND NURTURE CONNECTIONS***

If there was one piece of advice I wish I had had understood better and followed earlier in my career, it is this one. Looking back, though, it is clear to me why I it took me awhile to realize its importance.

When I was an associate and even a young partner, I thought that I was just too busy working on my deals, trying to make partner or be a successful partner, and trying to be a good

mother and wife at the same time. I just did not think I had time for what I viewed as unnecessary socializing.

But, in retrospect, I see that in part this was a convenient excuse, and the more important reason was that I was completely intimidated by the word “networking.” I did not know what it meant. I just did not know what to do.

To be fair, I do recall one instance as a young partner being in a slow patch at work – convinced that no one loved me and I would never have another deal. A close friend, who worked in the development office at Harvard College, told me to make one call every day to a client and set up a lunch. Easy for her to say, I thought, that’s what she does in her day job, but it felt very awkward to me. But I was getting pretty bored and desperate, so I tried it. Within two weeks I was busy again. Simply reminding people of my existence – I am not even sure I went to one lunch – seemed to create the desired work.

But creating a *real* network is much more than this – and it is something that is extremely professionally and personally rewarding. What it involves is simply taking time on a regular basis to stay in touch with lots of people outside your circle of close friends – college and law school classmates, people you meet in business settings or while travelling, neighbors, parents of your kids classmates – the list can get quite long.

And what is even more important is *how* you stay connected. Because what matters in developing meaningful relationships is that you always think about what you can do for the others in your network – not about what they can do for you. Is there an article you can send them on something they are interested in? Can you offer to take them to dinner if they are in town? Congratulate them on the birth of a child, or just send a holiday card or birthday message? More substantively – and perhaps when you are more senior – can you refer them

business, recommend them for a job, a speech or a board position? You and your friends have to look out for each other.

It does take some time, but probably less time than you think. One just needs to keep a list of people to reach out to every few months and make sure that, one way or another, you connect regularly. Of course this list grows over time, and some people become more important than others. And that's all good.

But if you stay connected, and take opportunities to expand your network when you can, you will find that over the years you will have created a huge resource for yourself of a large number of men and women in different spaces and different places who you can ask for advice on a variety of matters, or for a connection to another person or for a recommendation. As I have said, the rewards – personally and professionally – are enormous.

And you should not limit who you include in your network because you do not think you have much in common with them. There is recent work by Columbia Business School professor Damon Phillips which has found that the most useful informal networks are those that are “open” as opposed to “closed.” Open networks involve many different people who are not connected to each other, whereas in closed networks, many people in the network have interlocking connections. Interestingly, Professor Phillips found that men were more likely to build open networks – the type most effective for business and professional development - whereas women and people of color favored more closed networks with people more like them. So when you reach out, do so broadly.

Finally, there is a place for formal networks too, though I think these are less important. My founding of the Kate Stoneman Project – a network of women partners in ten leading NYC-based firms – really grew out of my frustration that, after 30 years of practicing law in New

York, I knew no virtually senior women lawyers at other firms. And, in fact, creating this formal network has proved to be a wonderful resource for all of us and a great catalyst for expanding our informal networks as well. So there is a place for formal networks too – like alumni groups and events – but they largely serve as stepping stones to help build your own powerful informal network.

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Change may not have occurred as quickly as I expected it would when I was in law school, but we have certainly come a long way. I do see in all the spheres in which I move – law firms, corporations and the non-profit world – a true readiness to move to the next level, a growing belief in the value of diversity for a range of reasons that go far beyond a sense that it is the “right” thing to do.

In April 2006, The Economist stated in an article entitled “A Guide to Womenomics,” that “*women remain perhaps the world’s most under-utilised resource.*” In more and more places, I see this being realized in a variety of different ways. In the corporate world, there is a growing recognition of the value that diversity brings to decision-making and to the bottom line. A 2011 Catalyst study showed that major companies with three or more female directors achieved significantly better financial results than those with none. And while I have not spoken much today about women outside of the developed world, there is equally a growing recognition that investing in and empowering women is the key to achieving meaningful economic development and creating a just civil society and more lasting peace in the world. As we say at the Global Fund for Women, women really do hold the solutions.

Yet I come back to where I started, which is that for real change to occur, women need to hold *leadership positions* in roughly equal numbers as men. We need to be at *all* the tables where decisions that affect us all are being made, and we need to be there in *meaningful numbers*. It is not a victory that we are equal as law school graduates; it will be a victory if we are equally successful at our 25<sup>th</sup> reunions.

So be purposeful and clear in your goals and in the way you live your professional life, be ambitious, speak up, build your networks, and think big. I am counting on all of you to get us to this place and create a world where we will no longer need to have these discussions, and importantly, where gender equality at all levels, and in all places, will be the norm, not the exception.

You really do have the solutions to build a better world.

Thank you.

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## Viewpoint: Women's Work -- Three Steps Closer to Gender Equality

Mallun Yen

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The Recorder invited Mallun Yen, the executive vice-president of RPX and the former head of global IP at Cisco, to deliver the keynote address at a Sept. 25 reception honoring the Recorder's 50 Women Leaders in Tech Law. Below is a condensed version of her talk.

Many of you know that I am a big supporter of women's issues and co-founded an organization called CHiPs, which is dedicated to the advancement of women in IP and technology.

While I have done a great deal of speaking on IP issues, the truth is that I have never publicly spoken expressly about women's issues.

But sometimes you just need a little nudge to get you out of your comfort zone and confront something that's been on your mind, so I do have some thoughts that I'd like to share with you tonight.

Let me start by telling you that after talking with many friends and colleagues, I found no consensus on the cause of the 'problem' or even whether there is a problem, how much of a problem there is, and what exactly is the problem. I also found no agreement on the right path forward: do we all need to 'lean in'? Or is it possible to opt out and then opt back in? Can women have it all as long as it isn't all at once? Should women stop trying to be Wonder Women in everything we do and hence we're our own worst enemy? Is it OK to be a Tiger Mom or should we all try to be more French?

The answer to all the above is yes. And that's because, as I say to my 6-year-old daughter and 8-year-old son often, everyone is different. That may seem obvious, but it's worth repeating—the right path for different women is different. What works for someone else isn't necessarily going to be right for you.

Consider: Until about 1970, women comprised less than 10 percent of law school enrollment. That number climbed, thankfully, and about 25 years ago, law schools had reached more than 40 percent women (we're up to 50 percent today).

In that modern era of law school equity, there was good reason to think that once women began to graduate and work their way up the ranks, we'd see them become partners at firms and running legal departments and within a quarter century or so, we'd see gender balance in the leadership ranks of the legal workplace.

Well, fast forward to today—we all know that hasn't happened. Not at all.

At top law firms, women comprise about 16 percent of partners. General counsels, 20 percent. By the way, this isn't just in the legal profession. Fourteen percent of executive officers at Fortune 500 firms are women; CEOs, 4 percent; U.S. Congress, 18 percent; VCs, 10 percent. When you look at the numbers, they all average out to 15 percent or so.

But 50 percent of U.S. college graduates are women, and they have been since the early '80s. And they comprise about half of the overall workforce.

So what's happening? There are lots of theories out there, but I'm going to focus on just three tonight.

First is what I call 'birds of a feather.' It's a theory that echoes the ideas of my friend and ChIPs co-founder Mona Sabet. She calls this the syndrome of the single story, or institutional bias.

Studies have shown that groups view others as leaders or potential leaders based upon how prototypical of the group that leader is.

So what does that really mean? Well, if the individuals in charge of giving access to leadership happen to be a bunch of Ivy League grads who golf, or if they aspire to be that kind of person, then those who fit that profile are more likely to be given access to leadership positions.

In other words, 'birds of a feather' are people who strive to be surrounded by people who are like them or are like the people they want to be. If you're a guy, with whom do you want to grab a beer or watch a ball game? If you're a woman, with whom do you want get your nails done or have in your book club?

Perhaps it's only natural, but when men comprise approximately 85 percent of the leadership positions, it also becomes self-perpetuating.

The second of the theories reflects what some may say are differences in personality traits viewed as either traditionally male or female. Let's call this theory 'confidence versus competence.'

Studies have found that groups without leaders naturally tend to end up with overconfident, self-centered and narcissistic individuals as leaders, and that these personality traits are not equally common in men and women.

Why do people do that? That's beyond my abilities as an armchair psychologist to say and frankly probably beyond our control to change human nature, but studies seem pretty settled that this is the case.

Let's take a look at what might be more within our control. Are these traits innate gender differences? Are women hard wired to multitask, stay at the camp and raise the kids while the man hunts? And in a Darwinian world, have women been naturally selected for traits that favor competence more than confidence? If so, how does that translate to our role as professional women and is it within our control to change?

My third theory is a concept uniquely applicable to women. I'll call this 'be careful what you wish for.' For the past 25 years or so, we have been told we could have it all. Debra Spar, Barnard College president, in her recent book *Wonder Women*, traces it all back to a Charlie commercial from the '80s. Remember the one with a successful working woman, glamorous in her business attire and stilettos, perfect hair blowing back—all while holding the hands of her children, with an adoring husband waiting to send her off to work? Well, I don't know about you, but that is exactly what my household was like this morning.

Perhaps we were fortunate in that when we were all coming of age, not only were we told we could have it all, we were also told we had choices. First of all, we did have choices our mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers didn't have—the choice to work at all. As long as we worked hard, we assumed we'd be promoted and achieve positions of leadership.

And then we were told that because the world was now more enlightened and egalitarian, we had the choice also to be mothers as well as professionals, and that we could juggle work and life just the same way men did it and more. We could be the Charlie woman who, after a 10-hour workday, could still go pick up the kids and cook an organic, gluten-free, locally harvested, ancient grain quinoa dinner.

And in the heady days post-Gloria Steinem, a lot of women felt liberated and empowered and free to make the choice to say, 'I can work, but I am making the choice not to.' It never crossed their mind that it might be difficult to opt back in.

But it turns out that it is difficult. Very difficult. A recent survey found that 89 percent of those who 'off-ramped' said they wanted to resume work; only 73 percent of these were able to, and only 40 percent of those got full-time jobs. And about a quarter took jobs with less management responsibilities or lower job titles than when they left.

Going forward, I certainly don't claim to have all the answers, nor do I think all these issues are readily solvable, but I do have a few observations that I'd like to offer as food for thought.

Regarding the theory of 'birds of a feather'—it's clear that until the gender numbers become more equitable at the highest levels, there will necessarily be a bias toward that single story. I'm not advocating hiring less-qualified people, and by no means are women lawyers less qualified as a class. They just happen to be a bird of a different feather; their backgrounds and paths might not look the same as the next guy. And awareness is the first step toward undoing any bias.

Beyond awareness, I do have a couple of concrete suggestions. First of all, many of you are in the position of doing a lot of hiring, so we can start by being a little more proactive there. Hiring and promoting goes on all the time in a legal department or law firm, and for reasons we've already examined, many of these personnel decisions are being made by men. That does not, however, mean that you need to keep your opinions to yourself. You want to be polite and professional, of course, but you can also be an advocate. Don't wait to be asked.

I can tell you from personal experience that this does work. When I was at Cisco, I would regularly call up partners at firms when I saw a promising young woman attorney and tell them that they needed to keep an eye on her because it was different for her than it was for them—even harder because she had no female role models in their group.

I found they were actually relieved that I had raised [the issue] in this time of such extreme political correctness. In fact, they welcomed the opportunity to have a candid conversation and seek advice. Law is, after all, also business. Partners want their partnerships to grow and the vast majority recognize the value of diversity as critical to future growth.

A second way we can help minimize the birds-of-a-feather mindset is by looking a little harder at that resume that isn't the 'easy resume'—the top 10 law school, law review, associate at top-tier law firm. Don't dismiss those who don't check all the single-story boxes—take a closer look at the substance behind it.

As for the second theory, the 'confidence versus competence' issue is something that has only become more apparent to me as I get more senior in my career. In my 20s and even my early to mid-30s, I kept my head down, learned as much as I could, tried to do good work and would get steadily promoted on my merits. I would have denied that there was any sort of real institutional bias or glass ceiling, because in those first years, I didn't experience much of either. The mantra of 'do good work and good things will happen' worked for me. For the first 10 to 15 years, just doing good work is good enough. But for the next 10 to 15 years, it isn't.

To move to the next level also requires the ability and willingness to market yourself. In other words, what is needed here are those 'confidence' skills that some say are not innately female.

Remember that study I mentioned about leaderless groups having a tendency to elect overconfident, self-centered and narcissistic individuals as leaders? Like it or not, groupthink often tends to favor flash over substance.

I've learned that being confident and able to market yourself is important for the second 10 to 15 years. But there are ways to do it without becoming someone you don't want to be. We as women can do it in our own way, a way with which we're comfortable. For example, if it really isn't natural for most women to brag about themselves, then maybe we need to start going out of our way to introduce others or boast about a colleague in a way that she might not do herself.

And awards like this, being presented tonight, are a brilliant opportunity—let others do the bragging for you. Put it on your Facebook/LinkedIn/Instagram/Pinterest page. Or better yet, have a friend do it and tag you instead, and vice versa. But don't downplay it. Celebrate yourselves as part of celebrating each other.

On that third theory of 'being careful what you wish for,' perhaps you can have it all and all at once, or you can have it all as long as it's not all at once, or you can have it all as long as you don't try to do it all too perfectly.

I don't know the answer. But I do know that it depends on who you are and what your support structure is at home. If you're a single mom, that's going to be very different than if you have a stay-at-home spouse. My husband Jason and I have always both worked full-time. I could have never done it without him and his complete support of my career and our family. We have also had the benefit of having family, including my mom and dad, close by who can pitch in.

But whatever your situation, make the choice that is right for you at that time and then have a plan for staying relevant. Things move fast. Your skills and experience can get stale pretty quickly, whether you've opted out for a while or even if you've stayed on track. If you've been doing the same thing for 10 to 15 years, how valuable to your organization are you really? Given the speed of change these days, you really don't have the luxury of not expanding your skill set, experience and network.

I used to think networking was a bad word and had a negative connotation. While I still have trouble saying the word 'networking' and I've yet to come up with a better alternative term, I do now realize the value in it. We as women can embrace our natural tendency to make personal connections with each other to then also benefit each other in business and hence continue to grow and stay relevant.

Take ChIPs for instance. Last year, co-founder Noreen Krall casually mentioned we should have a little cocktail party in D.C. to meet our East Coast counterparts. One thing led to another and five weeks later we had a sold-out summit with over 250 participants and a line-up of high-powered women speakers. What started out as an authentic desire to meet our East Coast counterparts turned out to be professionally valuable. In-house folks realized they didn't know all the great women in IP and hired new outside counsel they met as a result. Government folks invited many of us to testify at

their workshops. In-house counsel, whose companies were in disputes with each other, reached out directly to work things out on a more personal level.

Now, obviously, building networks is not a panacea for women wanting to advance their careers. But building relationships and keeping connections strong as a way of expanding and staying relevant will serve us all well. ChIPs is proof that it can work and still be enjoyable. I'd love to see more of these kinds of venues emerge. It's just one more way for us to provide a counterweight to the leadership gender imbalance in a way with which I think we're all comfortable.

We need to keep training great women, we need to keep them practicing for a long time, and we need to ensure that they ascend to the highest levels of the profession. Clearly that's going to take some work. And a lot of that I would say is women's work. I look forward to working with all of you here to make it happen.

*Mallun Yen is the executive vice-president of RPX Corporation and a co-founder of ChIPs, an organization with the mission of supporting and promoting the advancement, development and retention of women in patent and IP related fields.*

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