

The Clients Are Real, the Pitches Are Just for Practice

By **Chelsea Allison**

PALO ALTO — In-house counsel get pitched all the time, but they often see the same faces.

On Thursday, they saw some new ones, thanks to an event aimed at giving female associates and junior partners a chance to practice winning business.

“We see a lot of pitches, but—no surprise given the few women in senior leadership roles in firms—they’re often led by men,” said Mallun Yen, executive vice president at RPX Corp. and a cofounder of ChIPs, a group dedicated to advancing women in intellectual property.

ChIPs sought to level the playing field a bit with “Making a Winning Pitch,” convening senior lawyers from the likes of Apple, Cisco, Facebook and Samsung, established firm attorneys and more junior women for the mock-pitch session at the Palo Alto offices of Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr.

“It’s not often that you receive feedback on pitches with what you did right, what you did wrong, how you can make a better pitch, and generally what in-house attorneys are looking for,” Evelyn Mak, a partner in Wilmer’s Palo Alto office, wrote in an email. Yen said the organization wanted to help associates and junior partners develop the skills they need to advance. “In the first 10 to 15 years, simply doing good work can get you very far,” she said. “But in the second decade and beyond, you need to develop skills that aren’t naturally comfortable to most women—learning to effectively ‘sell’ or pitch yourself and your firm.”

The founders of ChIPs began working on the event in earnest a few months ago. They said they were blown away by the hours lawyers devoted to the cause. When they floated the idea to the sponsoring law firms—Wilmer, Morrison & Foerster and Fish & Richardson—and their colleagues both in-house and at firms, Yen said the response was overwhelming, with lawyers even agreeing to fly in for the event. She said their near-instant dedication of time and resources indicated that many appreciated how such efforts could make a difference in advancing the work of women.

Among the panelists: Apple chief litigation counsel Noreen Krall, Intuit’s Anirma Gupta and Google’s patent head Allen Lo.



Mallun Yen, RPX corp.

Jason Doi

The teams received a fact pattern for the pitch: a small company that’s just been sued in the Eastern District of Texas by a nonpracticing entity, but was also in merger talks with a larger company that had a licensing agreement with the NPE. “There were too many issues to cover in 35 minutes, so one of the main things, the biggest struggle, was what to cover,” said MoFo partner Colette Verkuil. She said her team took it as seriously as they would have taken a real pitch—and so did the panelists.

“They weren’t trying to make it easy for us,” she said. “They jumped right in there and had a lot of very tough questions.” Her teammate, Cara Ann Marr Rydbeck, a tech transactions associate who brought needed expertise in the M&A arena, added that she’d heard from others that “their panels were also very inquisitive.”

In addition to getting to know some of the decision-makers from the in-house community, participants said they valued the opportunity to collaborate with junior and senior women at their firms. Verkuil, Rydbeck and Esther Kim of MoFo said established partners like Rachel Krevans and Tessa Schwartz set aside significant time to mentor them leading up to the event.

Tamara Fraizer, a principal at Fish & Richardson, helped coordinate the Fish team’s prep.

“None of them had ever done this from start to finish, but they learned from each other and by doing it, and I thought they did a great job,” she wrote in an email. “I am so proud of them for seeing the value of this kind of exercise and for taking on the challenge, despite all their commitments elsewhere.”

It was an “extraordinary opportunity,” said Erin Jones, an associate at Fish, “to work together on a very particular skill set that is rarely practiced with training wheels.”

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