

The Magic of Finding a Unicorn
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It is no secret that women are outnumbered in the legal profession, and that is especially true in litigation. In my almost seven years of practice, I now notice it more when I am not the only woman in the room- because usually I am. Especially in business litigation. Opposing counsel are men. The clients are mainly men. The defendants? They tend to be men as well.

And there is much to learn and glean from all of these professionals, even when they are all men. There is no question that it is beneficial to engage with and learn from professionals who have been where you are now and have risen to levels where you want to be. But it just feels different when these professionals are women. When you are not the only woman in the room. When you can engage on a professional level - and even on a personal level - with a professional woman. Sometimes this seems so rare that it feels like you found a unicorn.

In the last couple years, when I did not even know I should be looking for one, I have found some real life unicorns. Not just working women, but really, really hard working women. Women who started from the very bottom. As junior secretaries at the company. As file clerks at the firm. Who are now at the pinnacle of their careers. Who have achieved things that very few people will ever be able to achieve- whether men or women. With spouses and children who still love and support them- and do not resent them. Not even a little bit. Who still love what they do. And who are crushing it in the legal and business world. Even better, I have been lucky enough to get to know some of these women- opposing counsel, co-counsel, clients. To have them take an interest in me and in my success as an attorney, as a working mother, and as a human being.

Please do not get me wrong, I have a number of male attorneys who I have the utmost respect and appreciation for, and who have helped shape me into the kind of attorney and person I want to be. And I am incredibly grateful for all of them. I would not trade those relationships and interactions for anything. But, as a younger female professional, there is just something special about seeing a woman on that mountaintop. Managing a firm and still being such a great mother that her kids tell her they have always known they are her passion. Taking a business from the ground floor to unprecedented success, while knowing every single employee's name. And even more amazingly, caring enough about future young professional women to offer encouragement, truly heartfelt advice, and spot-on understanding and acknowledgment of how hard it can be. These unicorns offer honesty, encouragement, reality checks (as needed), and productive, non-judgmental advice. They are the ultimate role models. They are the opposite of the kind of woman Madeleine Albright warned of when she said there was a special place in hell for women who do not help other women. These women are all about helping other women. Madeleine Albright would love them.

Over the past few years I have learned that there are few things as professionally and personally refreshing than having some of these unicorns in your life. Knowing it can be done - knowing they did it and are still standing to tell the story about it - makes even the rough days manageable. My advice: If you encounter someone you think might be a unicorn, talk to her. Ask how she does it. Tell her you admire her. Ask her to share her wisdom with you. She

will. And on days when it is hard, and you are asked if you are the court reporter, or someone calls you honey in front of your client, or you keep getting interrupted, or male opposing counsel will not make eye contact with you but is only acknowledging your male co-counsel, just knowing those unicorns are out there, and that they have been through these same difficulties (or worse), yet have still risen up on their mountaintop, helps.

Another benefit of seeking out these unicorns it is motivates you to want to be more like them. Not just professionally, but personally. It makes you want to be the kind of woman that other, younger, less experienced women can go to for honest advice. For feedback or perspective on an issue. Without any judgment or airs or condescension. Only encouragement and truth.

These women did not have it easy. Many of the unicorns I have encountered, who are now in their 50s or 60s, had to endure sexism that would make your skin crawl. But, through persistence, perseverance, creativity, and compassion, they were able to not only achieve their personal goals and aspirations, but to be the rising tide that continues to lift up everyone around them.

As Michelle Obama said, "[w]hen you've worked hard, and done well, and walked through that doorway of opportunity, you do not slam it shut behind you. No, you reach back and you give other folks the same chances that helped you succeed." And that is true of the unicorns. They are the ones holding the door open. They are the ones reaching out to young professional women who are interested in what they have to say. They do not have secrets. They will tell you what they did to get where they are. They will tell you where the challenges were and what they did to get through the tough times. You just need to listen. And learn. And maybe someday when you are on that mountaintop, and have made it through the doorway of opportunity, you will remember them. And then you can reach back and share your secrets with another generation of women who will hopefully have it easier than you did, but will still be able to benefit greatly from everything you have learned.