

Getting a Leg Up....Without Showing a Leg Up

As a young associate years ago, a male partner and I were discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the oral argument we had set for hearing the next day. After sorting through the factual and legal issues and reviewing the case law and our notes, the male partner then gave me some background on our judge – a male judge I'd not yet met or appeared before. Just as we were about to wrap up our preparations, the male partner gave me one last bit of advice and instruction, given what he knew about our judge. With a wink of an eye and prefaced with the word "Oh" as if it were an afterthought he didn't want to forget, the male partner said five words I'll never forget. "You should wear a skirt."

Now, if you ladies are like me, appalled at the discriminatory gender lines we sometimes face in this traditionally male-dominated career, this is where I'll remind you to pick your bottom jaw up off the floor and hold your tongue for now. As I stood there in the moment, not knowing what to say or do in response, fearing reprisal, a slew of comments and responses blasted through my head. As we all know, there's only one reason I was instructed to wear a skirt (and subliminally instructed not to wear pants). This male partner assumed, knowing this particular male judge so well, that I could get a leg up in our hearing if I also showed a little leg as well.

At a press conference in June 2013, the Dalai Lama advised that we need more leaders with compassion. The Dalai Lama went on to state that, "biologically, females have more potential" and "more sensitivity about others' wellbeing."