

OAJ WOMEN'S CAUCUS ARTICLE

Forward Progress for Women in the Practice of Law

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I was very honored when I was approached by the leadership of the Ohio Association for Justice to head up this year's Women's Caucus. This is really an exciting time for women to practice law! At present, females represent almost half of graduating law school classes in the State of Ohio. Diversity initiatives are a major focus of state and local bar associations, as well as in law firms across the state. The goal of these programs is to attract female and minority lawyers to the practice. The #MeToo Movement has brought national attention to inappropriate and unwanted conduct across all professions. The active discourse which has resulted from this increased scrutiny is helping us to move forward towards the elimination of the continuation of bad conduct in our practice.

Women have risen to the top of some of the most important and prominent legal positions in the State of Ohio. The Chief Justice of our state, Maureen O'Connor, the President of our organization, Ellen McCarthy, and the new President of the Ohio State Bar Association, Eleana Drakatos, are all prime examples of the new order and opportunity within our profession. From 1993 through 2010¹, the number of women judgeships increased from 14.8% to 25.3% in our state. Women are charting courses in the practice of law that were not possible or available to us just twenty years ago. Flexible work schedules allow us to achieve a work-life balance, leading to a greater sense of accomplishment on both professional and personal levels. However, there is still plenty of progress to be achieved for women in our profession. Statistics show that women still lag behind in attaining partnerships and equal pay for equal work.

It is imperative that women in the law work together to support each other now more than ever. We need to further the progress and momentum that has occurred over the last twenty years. Together, we need to actively support each other in our careers by fostering an environment of collegiality amongst women. Young women in our profession need our encouragement and guidance from the earliest days of their admission in the practice of law. The importance of strong female mentorships cannot be emphasized enough. We all need role models to confide in and discuss concerns from everyday caseload to firm politics. We need to encourage each other to boldly seek employment and success pursuing new opportunities in the legal field. We must take charge of defining career success based upon roadmaps we create, rather than those laid out by others from the past.

The purpose of the OAJ's Women's Caucus is to create ways to encourage and support each other. To begin, all female members of OAJ are encouraged to sign up and actively participate in the Women's Caucus listserve. This allows us to question each other in a "judgment-free" zone that fosters constructive feedback and guidance on professional issues. Members are also encouraged to pick up the phone and seek out other Women's Caucus members to form healthy mentor-mentee relationships. The Women's Caucus mixers, provided

at conventions, allow us the opportunity to network with each other. Our Caucus will be initiating interactive panel discussions for our members to address topics of concern to women in the practice of law. Issues to be discussed will include subjects such as treatment and interaction with judges, colleagues, and opposing counsel. It is expected that firm politics, work attire, trial tactics, and other issues will receive our attention. Juggling our personal and professional life on the tightrope we call the practice of law will be a major focus. Our hope is that we can have candid interaction involving everything from the mundane to the uncomfortable situations we encounter as we practice our profession. Everyone is invited to submit recommended topics for discussion. All thoughts and ideas are welcome. Please feel free to email me at lluka@lazzarolukalaw.com and/or contact me directly by telephone at 440-333-1445. I look forward to chairing the OAJ Women's Caucus this year and to facilitating further gains by women in these exciting times!

¹ Where We Stand, The 2016 Diversity & Inclusion Benchmarking Survey, *Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Journal*, June 2016 at p. 12.