



SUPPORTING FEMALE TALENT IN INTERNATIONAL LAW FIRMS – A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE



By Florence Forster
Managing Associate,
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According to both internal and external research (e.g. the PWC Law Firm Survey 2018), more than 55 % of the lawyers recruited by international law firms are female, but more than 80% of the partners are male. In some countries, like Germany, the ratio is even more striking with only 1 in 10 partners a female. In light of these figures, law firms have initiated specific programmes to support women in their career aspirations. One of these is the *Women's Leadership Programme* at Linklaters, in which I am currently enrolled.

I am a Managing Associate in the Corporate Department at Linklaters Luxembourg, successfully advising Private Equity clients. I have always been interested in international and cross-border business relations and – after studying in Germany, France and the US – have been admitted to the bar in Paris, New York and Luxembourg. Like most of my fellow female asso-

ciates (87%), I kept working full time after welcoming my kids in 2013 and 2019, juggling the joys and challenges of parenthood with those of my career. And it was when I came back from my second maternity leave that I felt ready for the next step in my career. But what I didn't know was: how was I to approach this best?

It is telling that I still vividly remember my male fellow law students at the time of our graduation announcing their goal of becoming a partner in a major law firm – at a time when for me, being hired as an associate in an international law firm was all I aspired to.

Let me introduce you to the programme!

And now, here I am – part of the *Women's Leadership Programme*, which was introduced in 2012 to develop and retain talented female managing associates and ultimately grow the population of female partners.

TAKE TIME TO THINK ABOUT YOUR CAREER: LOOK FOR YOUR UNIQUE SELLING POINT, WHAT KIND OF CAREER YOU WANT AND HOW YOU WANT CLIENTS AND COLLEAGUES TO PERCEIVE YOU.

Florence Forster

The programme includes:

- a series of trainings on key topics such as obtaining feedback, strategic networking, external perspective and image management,
- coaching by an external coach,
- monthly calls with a dedicated “development” partner,
- networking within the cohort.

A strict application process must be passed and every year approximately 30 female lawyers out of approximately 300 female managing associates working in different Linklaters offices in Europe, the US and Asia are accepted. The programme runs for a 9-month period, beginning in June. Participants are gathered in coaching groups of 5 lawyers to share their knowledge and develop career plans. A unique feature of the programme is the “development” partner – these are volunteers who, although they do not know the lawyer they’re matched with, understand the workings of the firm and are able to give advice, support and guidance during their relationship.

How do I experience the programme?

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the 2020/2021 programme has been organised fully virtually. Webinars on topics such as “Seeking Feedback”,

“Networking”, “Image Management” and “Business Development” have been particularly helpful.

I attend monthly coaching sessions with an external coach together with four other managing associates working in the London, New York and Lisbon offices. They helped me realise that my female peers were facing similar challenges and situations. It is extremely helpful to brainstorm, exchange ideas and support each other in these sessions.

The discussions with my development partner have proven extremely valuable. He answers all my questions sincerely and provides me with very transparent views of the career paths at the firm. The development partner working in a different office and a different practice helps to talk openly. My development partner regularly challenges me with questions, putting me in a position to make decisions and – more importantly – vocalize them. Moreover, he advises me how partners see and value things, what are the “Dos” and “Don’ts”.

From my perspective, this relationship is the most valuable part of the programme, giving me confidence in proceeding with my career aspirations, going step by step and taking things in my own hands. ●

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Take time to think about your career: look for your unique selling point, what kind of career you want and how you want clients and colleagues to perceive you.

Set objectives and vocalize them: set objectives and vocalize your ambitions.

Talk to the partners: talk to partners frequently and openly. Discuss your career aspirations, assess your opportunities and monitor your progress. Don’t be shy.

Seek feedback: actively seek for feedback. Ask for it regularly and ask for specific feedback. It is extremely valuable and gives you new energy and perspective. It pushes you to continuously improve but also helps seeing successes. It will make you stronger to develop your own brand.



SEIZE OPPORTUNITIES, LEARN AND DISCOVER



By **Vanessa Camilleri**

Head of AIFM, Conducting Officer,
Partners Group (Luxembourg) S.A.

I vividly recall my first day in the office in picturesque Guernsey, way back in September 2006! I had just landed a job in the Partners Group legal and transactions team and I was beyond elated. At the time, Partners Group was much smaller than we are nowadays. I believe I was employee no. 160. Today we count in excess of 1,500 employees.

Partners Group being a dynamic and fast paced environment, I was quickly exposed to different types of asset classes and a myriad of transactions. I suppose one of the first challenges was adapting to being an in-house lawyer, where one is part of the decision-making process and not an advisor with an outside view. Despite the challenges and the steep J-curve, I thoroughly enjoyed the solutions-oriented environment and the camaraderie with the investment teams. Solutions, wanting to better things and working together remains one of the hallmarks of Partners Group.

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Vanessa Camilleri

Over time, I wanted to expand my role, broaden my horizons and learn about other aspects of the organisation. I was entrusted with various responsibilities throughout the years, such as acting as director on some of our Partners Group entities, building an in-house depository business and heading the Luxembourg AIFM. This helped understand the value chain and join the dots. This not only expanded my horizons and equipped me with further experience to see the broader picture, but it also enabled me to grow on the professional and personal front.

What have I learnt throughout the years and what would my tips be?

As always, I think, what is key is for one to do what one is passionate about. It is also fundamental that what one does gives a person purpose in life. For instance, knowing that Partners Group is fulfilling the dreams of retirees, through delivering sustainable returns to our pension scheme clients, or creating jobs through our portfolio companies, humbles me and drives me to continue delivering my best.

Also, seize every opportunity to learn and to discover new things. Stay curious! Be humble to accept what you don't know, accept what you need to improve and work hard on developing. Speak to your colleagues, help them out in true team spirit and work towards a common objective. Not only is there pride in achieving together, there is also joy in sharing the success with others. Lastly, do not fear challenge or plunging into non-comfort zones: we grow professionally and personally through stretch assignments. Go for them! ●

SURVIVAL KIT FOR A WOMAN IN A MALE INDUSTRY



By Anja Grenner

Head of Sales Fund Services Luxembourg at TMF Group

This is a male dominated industry. It has been for centuries in every country. And there has been little change since I started to work in this industry 28 years ago. To whichever conference I may go, whichever client I may see, the top positions are occupied by men. 28 years ago and today. That is reality.

Now, I don't have the perfect recipe for how to make a career as a woman opposed to a man and this is also not a cookbook. But over the years there have a couple of lessons that I learned – some more entertaining, some a bit more painful. So here's now a few that worked for me:

- 1.** Be simply better than your male counterpart – which means in this industry in particular – technically better. You should be able to answer at least 95% of all questions on the spot that potential or existing clients may have – no matter how technical. Today that also means being able to answer questions about systems, systems architecture, security etc. If a woman can answer those questions, it gains the respect of clients.
- 2.** Have confidence in yourself. You can do it – don't ask yourself the question if you can do it – just do it. If you think you don't have the skills at the moment: by the time you start a new job you can develop them. The other (male) candidates will likely say yes too, probably with as much or little knowledge as you. But they will go for it, assuming that they will learn on the job. Women put themselves too much into question.
- 3.** And if it goes wrong, don't take it personally. Women tend to start a self-analysis what they did wrong, while men often – maybe as a self-defense mechanism – find external factors responsible for a failure. So, yes, do the analysis but then try it again, like most men do. Devel-

oping a teflon skin helps standing up and doing it again, don't be intimidated. For me also the main reason why there are so few women entrepreneurs...

4. Develop smarter relationships. If you want to get something or somewhere, and you are falling on deaf ears, find yourself some allies. Don't give up. It can take a bit longer to drill holes as a woman. Networking also works for women, you don't have to join your colleague's beer evenings.

5. Learn to be assertive and learn the difference between this and aggression. Even if you are not a boxer, sometimes do make use of your elbows. Not that this should be a standard weapon but sometimes some people just do not get it. If you really want something, say that you want it, professionally but assertively. Give reasons why you think you should get it and nobody else. If you don't, likely that someone else will.

6. Think twice before you get emotional. For example: you are being consistently ignored in meetings though you have the better ideas, you actually voice them but your boss does not listen – but when somebody else – male obviously – reformulates your idea and your boss finds it a fantastic idea... what do you do? Remain silent and start a fight or send a nasty mail to your colleague afterwards, send a mail to your boss that this was your idea and not the one of your colleague? These things happen again and again. I still haven't found the perfect answer how to handle people that do not take you seriously as a woman but the solution for sure is not becoming over-emotional (speak: freaking out or getting frustrating and giving up). Unfortunately, this simply fits the male stereotype that we are fighting against.

7. Be clear on your goals and set your standards higher than simply "doing a good job". Women often subconsciously expect recognition for softer skills – things which often go unnoticed and don't affect the company's bottom line. Defining more clearly what you want to achieve and how this will benefit the business will naturally lead you to demonstrating the right skills to get you noticed and get to where you want to be.

I love working with particularly younger women. I have always tried to give them the feeling that they can do it too. But I also like it if I am the only woman in a crowd of men, which is fortunate – because mostly I am! ●

DEVELOP SMARTER RELATIONSHIPS. IF YOU WANT TO GET SOMETHING OR SOMEWHERE, AND YOU ARE FALLING ON DEAF EARS, FIND YOURSELF SOME ALLIES. DON'T GIVE UP.

Anja Grenner

DIVERSITY IS IMPORTANT FOR A BUSINESS TO FLOURISH



By Daniela Klasen-Martin

Group Head of Management Company Services, Managing Director at Crestbridge

I started my career in 1991 in the automotive business as a financial controller, working in Stockholm and Paris before moving to Luxembourg in 1997. I spent nearly 10 years working for Schroders where I was head of finance and a member of the executive committee. In 2006 I moved from Schroders to The Directors Office as CEO and joined Crestbridge in 2010 to set-up the Luxembourg office and third party ManCo services.

I have always worked in a predominantly male environment, the automotive business forced me to set the boundaries early on. As a woman, this is an important and subtle process, it is something you portray in your demeanour and behaviour as opposed to in direct statements. There is a certain amount of confidence involved, you need to be able to show that you are unimpressed with any kind of dominant behaviour and that you can stand up for yourself.

I WOULD STRESS THAT THOUGH WOMEN CAN LEARN FROM SOME MALE BEHAVIOURS, THEY SHOULD KEEP THEIR OWN STYLE. DIVERSITY IS IMPORTANT FOR A BUSINESS TO FLOURISH.

Daniela Klasen-Martin

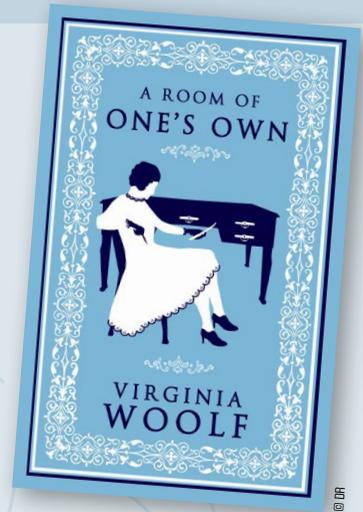
I had to show that I was ambitious and competitive. Whether through nature or nurture, competitiveness seems to be more natural or engrained in men. I had to prove that I was just as ambitious, if not more so, than my male colleagues and ensure that I was considered and respected.

I have always been very ambitious and pushed frequently for new challenges and progression. I think that women work very hard to provide quality but seldom ask for reward. You need to believe in yourself and you shouldn't be shy to ask for things that you want.

I would also advise finding a mentor. I have never had a mentor but I had a few bosses that directly or indirectly led me to progress. I had one boss that was key for me, he was very charismatic and convinced me to take a new challenge, which was determinative for my career. He was known for being difficult, though once you had gained his respect he would push you to the next step. I learned from him how to be tough and not to be afraid to speak out.

Finally, I would stress that though women can learn from some male behaviours, they should keep their own style. Diversity is important for a business to flourish. When I came back to work after having my first child I was repeatedly asked by my boss if I was sure I didn't want to work part time. I found that very disturbing and I made it clear that I didn't. It has happened that when I walk into a meeting with a male colleague the other men in the room naturally assume that my colleague is the boss, not me. I generally take that with humour. In all cases it is important to make your position clear. ●

WALKING ON THE EDGE TO "HAVE IT ALL"



By **Catherine Pogorzelski**

Country Managing Partner -
DLA Piper Luxembourg

I generally don't like to talk about myself and even less so in relation to 'success'. What is 'success', after all? Success may be one sided and short lived and will typically be sequenced. I would rather discuss gender equality, broader access of women to still men-oriented fields of work and diversity (be it gender, cultural or cognitive) as successes with long lasting effects. These topics are much closer to my vision of leadership.

As far as I can remember, I always wanted to 'have it all'. Early on I had a clear sense of what I wanted to achieve and I was ready to work hard to make it possible. I actually never took as role models, women who made the career choice to the detriment of their personal and family life. It was simply not me - and I also believe that there is no need to do so - but instead I knew that finding the right partner to both encourage me and to share the burden was an essential part of the plan. I found that partner and we work collaboratively as a team at home as I do with my colleagues at work.

As a teenager I was hooked up to horseback riding and jumping in particular. This is a discipline that requires hard work, resilience, humility and even courage. Today, I rely on my ability to look ahead and focus on long-term goals without being distracted or afraid of potential short-term challenges that inevitably arise on the way. Also, I force myself not to be distracted by the famous imposter syndrome - no time nor energy to waste on that! However I push myself too much and too far at times and I find myself

walking on the edge. This is when I take a step back to consider and reflect on the situation. Sometimes for hours and days...

When back on track, I aim to do well and to be fair quite intuitively; combined with a forward looking mindset and my ability not to stick to difficulties and struggles, not to be resentful or ruminate have proven really useful on my career path. That being said, I would not consider myself as being overly positive nor deprived of any self-doubts. Just being able to go through career life frustrations as something normal but which has no power to hold me back. After all, you need to keep your mind open to seize opportunities which in turns allow me to stay open to others and to connect easily. Interactions thus nourish me and allow me to recharge.

Also, I don't really believe in feminine or masculine traits or any kind of such categorisation which I find dangerous insofar as they have no scientifically evidenced foundations and certainly have the power of crystallizing socially-built differences. I just believe in the power of being fully myself with all my diversity and complexity. This means that I have the right to fail, the right to be stressed and I can be (very) difficult to deal with at times. When I follow my instinct I want to grow, learn, discover and get surprised and finally embrace this 'who I am' in an intuitive way without trying to fit artificially in a norm or a model that would by nature not fit me.

Enough said about me and my inner beliefs. Referring to Elena Morrissey's book I fully concur with her that it's 'a good time to be a girl'. ●

ANYTHING MAY HAPPEN WHEN WOMANHOOD HAS CEASED TO BE A PROTECTED OCCUPATION.

Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own