

Female Powerbrokers Q&A: Anderson Kill's Pamela Hans

Law360, New York (January 22, 2014, 1:35 PM ET) -- Pamela D. Hans is the managing shareholder of Anderson Kill PC's Philadelphia office. Her practice concentrates in insurance coverage exclusively on behalf of policyholders. Her clients include utilities, mining companies, home builders, nonprofit organizations, ethanol producers, commercial lenders, and hog processors, whom she has represented in disputes with their insurance companies. She has also represented automobile manufacturers and other Fortune 50 Companies in product liability matters, and counseled these clients and others, including utilities, on regulatory matters. She has also represented design professionals in professional liability and design defect claims. Early in her career, Hans was a law clerk to the Honorable Judge Donald F. Campbell in the Superior Court of New Jersey, Ocean County.

Q: How did you break into what many consider to be an old boys' network?

A: Before entering law school, I completed a master's degree in civil engineering. At that time, women were just starting to enter the engineering field in greater numbers — but we were still only 10 percent of the student population. In the workplace, we were similarly outnumbered. When I started law school and worked in law firms, it appeared to me that the profession was filled with so many women that I never considered it to be an “old boys’ network.”

Q: What are the challenges of being a woman at a senior level within a law firm?

A: For me, as with many people, the biggest challenge has been balancing professional and personal responsibilities. When I discussed that perpetual balancing act with a vice president of a Fortune 50 corporation, she told me that her “solution” was to be 100 percent focused on whatever she was doing at the time. I have tried to follow that advice and focus on the activity of the moment, whether it is writing a brief, enjoying an evening out with my husband, arguing a case in court, or building a Lego fortress with my toddler.

Q: Describe a time you encountered sexism in your career and tell us how you handled it.

A: As an associate, I attended a conference and was sitting between two men who were managing partners of major law firms. These gentlemen bragged that they had not been in a grocery store in more than a decade and did not know how to do laundry — because their wives took care of that for them. They continued to boast that they were “keeping their wives busy” by letting them redecorate the house or renovate the kitchen. Since then, I have used that anecdote to remind other attorneys — both men and women — that it is important for each of us not to lose perspective. Bragging that you have no responsibilities outside of work, perhaps assuming that the same must be true for all your colleagues, is a quick way to create resentment, alienate a colleague, and prevent someone from being a ready team

player.

Q: What advice would you give to an aspiring female attorney?

A: It is my impression that women sometimes target law firms that advertise themselves as “woman friendly.” I have never done that. Instead, I have sought out firms that are “people friendly” — that is, firms that have good retention of associates and partners. That is generally a good indicator that the firm is a good place to work and one which values and respects the contributions of its attorneys. I believe that when a firm’s leadership values people, whether those people are male or female, it will naturally follow that they value women as well.

Q: What advice would you give to a law firm looking to increase the number of women in its partner ranks?

A: Be understanding and flexible in how you treat women as they raise their young children. Remember that a female attorney with a family may not have a “stay at home” spouse to manage the home front. For senior partners with wives who chose to stay home and raise families, think about how different your work experience would have been if you had to leave at a set time to get your children from daycare, or find time to take your children to doctor appointments or make cupcakes for bake sales — in addition to doing excellent legal work. By being understanding and flexible as your attorneys juggle the demands of profession and family, you will create loyal attorneys who will appreciate the good treatment they received, and reward your firm accordingly.

Q: Outside your firm, name an attorney you admire and tell us why.

A: I admire David Dunlop of McMillan LLP. Early in my career, David taught me the importance of treating everyone with respect, valuing family and cultivating relationships with clients. He demonstrated that by doing those things as well as excellent legal work, he had a full and rewarding professional and personal life. I often think of David’s humility when I hear complaints about office size or other “trappings” of large-firm practice. David’s response — I need a desk and a phone — reminds me that if we focus on the important things, everything else will follow naturally.

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