



Female Powerbrokers Q&A: Pryor Cashman's Colleen Caden

Law360, New York (February 26, 2014, 2:45 PM ET) -- Colleen L. Caden is a partner in Pryor Cashman LLP's New York office, where she chairs the firm's business immigration group. She represents clients in the pharmaceutical, media, consumer products and food manufacturing industries as well as in the professional sports, arts and entertainment fields. She also serves as sole U.S. immigration counsel to leading companies across the country. Caden was also recognized as among the top 50 female lawyers in New York by Super Lawyers-Metro Edition and was selected by Human Resource Executive as one of "The Nation's Most Powerful Employment Attorneys" for the second consecutive year.

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

A: Since beginning my career in the mid-1990s, I haven't encountered the stereotypical "old boys' network" that my female counterparts faced a generation ago and some still face today. Maybe I've been lucky, but I choose to believe instead that my success is a direct result of my hard work.

From the start of my career, I took advantage of every opportunity that came my way all while continuing to hone a skill set that is necessary in this field regardless of your gender. That meant working extra hard to sharpen my legal knowledge, developing client relationships and building a reputation as the "go to" expert in my field of immigration.

When I was given the opportunity four years ago to launch and chair the immigration practice at Pryor Cashman, I knew I was prepared for the challenge. Since then, the practice has more than doubled in size, the numbers of matters we take on has increased dramatically and our client roster has expanded.

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

A: For women — and men — rainmaking and business development is always a challenge of the profession, and it is an obstacle to success in this field. With in-house teams demanding that their outside counsel do more with less, the legal landscape is incredibly fierce as we all compete for the same legal services dollar.

For me, networking and keeping my business development pipeline full has been critical. I'm keenly aware that women network differently than men and I also appreciate that we often have limited time to attend all of these events due to the demands of family. With these issues in mind, I've taken the opportunity to get involved in volunteer and philanthropy causes that are important to me and where I can meet people in leadership positions and at the board level. In fact, I'm on the board of directors of the Junior League of the City of New York and that is just one example of how a professional activity has opened up a new world of connections and business opportunities for me.

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

A: Without question, I have benefited from the hard work and perseverance of generations of women before me who have overcome sexism in what was once a male-dominated legal field. But, every now and then I hear a sexist comment that makes me knit my brows. In one heated meeting, for example, as tensions rose and stress levels became intense, the lone male at the table asked that we “calm down,” and not get “too dramatic.” The women in the room ignored the comment and instead responded by solving the problem and saving the day.

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

A: I would tell an aspiring female lawyer to take full responsibility for managing and controlling her career. No one will do it for you. This was advice I was given early in my career and it has resonated with me. You must actively and thoughtfully plan your path to success — however you may define success. I also encourage female attorneys to say “yes” to opportunities that present themselves — a pro bono case or an opportunity to take a leadership position, for example. I believe that doors open for a reason and that one should walk through the door to explore the opportunity as it will often yield unexpected rewards.

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

A: Providing resources for women attorneys is vital so that they have access to advice on leadership, networking, career development and rainmaking. At Pryor Cashman, I was part of a group of women who launched a Women’s Leadership Initiative Program dedicated to the advancement of women attorneys in the firm. The initiative provides a platform for women attorneys at all phases of their careers to engage in professional training, mentoring, business development and philanthropy. The initiative also strives to create programs that show women how to mine opportunities, develop business and be leaders.

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

A: During my legal career, I’ve looked to extraordinary women who have been trailblazers in the legal field. I have always been curious (and intrigued) about each woman’s insights and perspectives and how each forged her career path. In each of their stories there are lessons to be learned — I’m thinking of Margaret Thatcher, Sandra Day O’Conner, Hillary Clinton and, most recently, Christine Lagarde, managing director of the International Monetary Fund.

After Lagarde was elected to the top spot at the IMF, I was struck by interview she gave in which she described her early career as a lawyer. She said that she aspired to be a partner at the law firm she was with and she was shocked when a male partner told her that they did not elect women to partnership. Lagard, though, didn’t let that firm squash her dream or ambition. She said she immediately left and, as we know, went on to have a noteworthy career as an antitrust and labor lawyer. She later became a partner with Baker & McKenzie, where the partnership elected her as chairman.

At different points in my career, when I've been faced with challenges and adversity, I've reflected on what these women have done and said for my inspiration and motivation.