

Female Powerbrokers Q&A: Dechert's Cathy Botticelli

Law360, New York (December 18, 2013, 1:37 PM ET) -- Catherine Botticelli is a partner in Dechert LLP's Washington, D.C., office. She is a member of the firm's policy committee and formerly co-chaired the firm's securities litigation group. She represents public companies and their officers and directors, as well as broker-dealers, investment advisers and investment companies and their boards in investigations and proceedings before the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority and various state regulators, as well as in securities-related litigations in state and federal court and in arbitrations. Botticelli also has conducts internal investigations in the public company and mutual fund areas and advises audit committees and special litigation committees. She also has advised corporations regarding their obligations under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.

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

A: I had a number of “old boys” who were willing to teach me and were terrific role models. When I came up the ranks, there were not many women in law firm partner positions. My strategy was to find work that I liked to do and then figure out who the best lawyer in the firm was who could teach me what I needed to know. I also learned that always being available and showing a willingness to jump in and take on new challenges gave me access to opportunities I may not otherwise have had. I currently serve on our firm’s policy committee along with another woman partner, Ann Caviani Pease, but I’m quite pleased to say the way was paved for us to hold these leadership positions by those outstanding women who came before us.

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

A: I am called upon to fulfill many roles while maintaining an active case load. While you have to be careful to set priorities and not get overextended, you also have an obligation to the institution as a whole and mentoring and helping others to succeed becomes ever more important. I know that my male colleagues have similar concerns and equally pressing demands on their time, but I think women feel a special obligation to get the balance just “right.”

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

A: I have been fortunate in my career not to have experienced overt sexism. I don’t know what may have occurred behind the scenes, but I always found that the work is what mattered the most and being fearless. Not being afraid to take on new challenges or putting yourself in new situations.

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

A: The legal marketplace is more competitive than when I started practicing almost 25 years ago. The challenges for all of us, regardless of our gender, are greater than they have ever been. In this environment, it is important to be proactive and not wait for the work to come to you. Also, developing a specialty can increase your marketability. You want to position yourself so that you have skills that are sought after; this will give you greater flexibility. Finally, it is never too early to begin thinking about networking and other opportunities to raise your profile.

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

A: Law firms should be doing all they can to sponsor and promote the talented women in their ranks. It is important that they get the opportunities to develop the skills that they will need to advance to the next level. There also needs to be a career path for women that want/need a greater work-life balance. I'm quite pleased to say that Dechert's global women's initiative, under the capable guidance of our partners Abbi Cohen and Miriam Gonzalez, are addressing these issues within our firm. We are striving to empower our younger lawyers by promoting a fostering and supportive environment and by working to give them the tools they need for development and advancement.

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

A: Kristine M. Wellman, in-house counsel at ING Direct. I have known Kristine for close to 10 years and have watched her carve a path for herself in the in-house world. She is very talented and has great judgment. I have admired her career choices and her willingness to take risks.

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