

We Still Need Women's Bar Associations

BY HELEN PERRY GRIMWOOD

JUSTICE LORNA LOCKWOOD, the first woman to serve on Arizona's Supreme Court, planted the seeds for the Arizona Women Lawyers Association. During the 1960s and 1970s, she invited every woman lawyer to her lunch table at the Arizona Club, every week. By 1976, the group had grown too big for one table, but the roots for the Arizona Association of Women Lawyers had taken hold. In 1980, this Phoenix group merged with its Tucson counterpart to become the Arizona Women Lawyers Association.

The AWLA now boasts a diverse membership of more than 850 women and men from a wide range of practice areas, work environments and levels of experience, including law students, associates, partners, members of academia, in-house counsel, lawyers who have chosen other careers and members of the state and federal judiciary. The AWLA is comprised of two chapters—Maricopa (which includes Northern Arizona counties) and Southern Arizona—to address members' needs and goals at the local

level. In keeping with the tradition established by Justice Lockwood, the Maricopa Chapter still meets monthly at the Arizona Club for lunch.

Part of the impetus for the AWLA's formation was that traditional bar associations did not actively support women's entrance into the profession and did not provide a helpful or supportive forum for many of their concerns.

Conditions have changed. Through the efforts of many, the traditional bar associations have worked hard to become more diverse and to foster diversity. In fact, of the 26 voting members of the State Bar Board of Governors, eight are women, and during the last 20 years, three of the 20 State Bar presidents have been women. Not only has the State Bar adopted policies of inclusion, but it is constantly working to implement them.

Nevertheless, women's bar associations must continue to provide focused leadership and a voice for issues important to women in the profession. What has changed is that the traditional bars, the judiciary and others in our legal community encourage this—in fact, they depend on it. They depend on the women's bar to keep track of both progress and failure, to speak up, and to advocate constructive and appropriate change.

Of course, there is still work to do. No longer are women excluded from the legal profession, but they still have not gained much access to the social and business networks that are crucial to business development. No longer are law firms off-limits for women with children, but satisfactory flexible schedules are still the exception. No longer are women categorically excluded from litigation practice, but good training programs to help them hone trial skills are still few and far between. No longer are women's innate qualifications for "forensic strife" the subject of open debate, but they still do not benefit from the presumption of competence that their male counterparts frequently enjoy.

It should come as no surprise that women lawyers are still underrepresented in many law firm partnerships, the judiciary and law school faculties, even when

the figures are controlled for age and experience. "The pipeline leaks, and if we wait for time to correct the problem, we will be waiting for a very long time," observes Prof. Deborah L. Rhode, chair of the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession.

Perhaps this explains why membership and interest in women's bar associations have never been higher. They keep growing because they continue to help women lawyers in dealing with issues of common concern.

The AWLA is a good example. It provides CLE skills programs specifically tailored to women advocates. It monitors the judicial appointment process and the advancement of women to law firm partnerships. Its business development forums have helped women learn more effective marketing techniques. In the tradition of Justice Lockwood's lunch group, it also offers a special camaraderie. It's a place where women lawyers make no apologies for who they are or what they do, where they can support and celebrate each others' successes and where they can help each other deal with professional and personal challenges.

Women's bar associations also assist one another. The National Conference of Women Bar Associations serves as an umbrella for such associations throughout the country. It conducts leadership summits, provides a national voice for the associations and facilitates the exchange of ideas and experiences. This year, it began hosting a Web site and an e-mail listserv for women in bar leadership throughout the country.

As long as women's bar associations continue to serve the needs of women in the profession, they will continue to flourish, and the entire profession will be the better for it.

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The Practitioner's Toolbox

The AWLA is online:

- State Web site:
www.geocities.com/awla2000
- Maricopa County Chapter Web site:
www.awla-maricopa.org
- Maricopa County Chapter e-mail:
awla_maricopa@hotmail.com
- Southern Arizona Chapter e-mail:
azawla@yahoo.com

Women's Groups and Resources on the Web

National Conference of Women Bar Associations—<http://www.ncwba.org/>
 ABA Commission on Women in the Profession—
<http://www.abanet.org/women/>
 National Women Law Students' Association—
<http://www.nwlsa.org/>

salary based on that target.

- Some firms reduce or even eliminate benefits for part-time lawyers.

Regardless of the formula, there needs to be a built-in financial disincentive to opt for reduced hours. To reduce the resentment, the part-time lawyer needs to make a financial sacrifice in exchange for more time out of the office. Just as important is the notion that the arrangement must be adjusted to provide that the part-time lawyer generate at least her overhead. It is essential that the full-time lawyer not feel as though she is “carrying” her part-time colleagues. “Profitability is the only thing that works,” remarks a part-time partner in Phoenix. “If the arrangement is profitable for the firm, it works; if the lawyer is not profitable, the arrangement fails. The part-time lawyer must carry her weight.”

Openness is also critical. Secret deals between management and part-time lawyers foster an atmosphere of inequity.

Another sticky issue surrounds the definition of part-time. To whom does it apply? A partner winding down? Someone with an aberrant bad year? Inflexible rules about who is and who is not a part-time lawyer can inadvertently label lawyers as part-time. Guidelines about what is considered part-time are helpful, but defining the term by setting minimum billable hours for all lawyers is probably unwise.

Finally, the part-timer needs to be as flexible with the firm as she wants the firm to be with her. If a part-timer always acts as though she is punching a clock, then her peers may justifiably resent her. The arrangement, after all, needs to work for the firm and its clients, too.

Hon. Ann A. Scott Timmer is a judge on the Arizona Court of Appeals. She was appointed to the bench in 2000 following 15 years of practice. During that time, she has raised three children and has always worked a traditional, full-time schedule.

Maureen Beyers is a lawyer at Osborn Maledon, P.A., in Phoenix. She has practiced law for 14 years and, since moving to Arizona six years ago, has worked on a reduced-hours schedule. She is the mother of two children.