

CHICAGO LAWYER®

WOMEN@WORK

Law school sets the groundwork for a lawyer's legal career, but I'm beginning to feel that a significant piece of that foundation has been missing. When I was in law school (a lifetime ago), I was taught the traditional curriculum — civil procedure, torts, contracts, trial advocacy, etc. And while those courses taught me substantive law, and how to analyze a case and write and speak persuasively, none of them focused on leadership training or prepared me for the unique experience of practicing law as a woman. Quite frankly, at the time, I didn't realize that female lawyers might benefit from specialized training.

Flash forward to the recent dialogue on the lack of women in leadership positions in the law — in law firms, in-house counsel positions, the judiciary and law school faculty. There is a major discrepancy even though women have comprised at least half of graduating law school classes for at least two decades.

The disparity has been attributed to a variety of factors, including lack of sponsors, training and opportunities, as well as explicit and implicit bias, but there isn't consensus on how we should remedy the problem.

Recently, I learned about an innovative class at Loyola University Chicago School of Law called Women and Leadership. The class attempts to prepare female lawyers for the challenges they will face throughout their careers. Kristin Finn, assistant director of the Beazley Institute for Health Law and Policy, started the class three years ago. I asked Kristin about the class and her goals for the students enrolled.

CK: What was the inspiration for the Women in Leadership class?

KF: For many years, the number of women graduating from law school has been equal to men. However, women are still not advancing to the highest levels of the legal profession in proportional numbers, and they are not being paid the same amount as men for equal work.

I was inspired to create and teach a Women and Leadership course for law students because I wanted to find a way to offer a safe, structured environment to talk about the internal and external barriers women encounter throughout their careers.

My hope is that our class readings and discussion will help my students make thoughtful and strategic choices throughout their careers. Very few other law schools offer coursework that fo-



TEACHING LEADERSHIP

An interview with Loyola's 'Women and Leadership'

By CAMILLE KHODADAD

cuses specifically on advancing women in the profession, and I would like to help change that.

CK: How is the course structured and what topics do you discuss?

KF: I have found that a seminar course is an excellent environment for learning about leadership topics. The course is capped at 10 students and taught around a conference table. The course examines the obstacles (internal and external) that prevent women from reaching leadership positions in proportional numbers.

Students engage in dialogue and reflection in response to assigned readings, podcasts and TED Talks. They also hear from guest speakers: Female lawyers in leadership positions who discuss their experiences and the decisions that helped shape their careers.

When it comes to career planning, women often have unique considerations and experiences that shape their goals. Many women also face distinct challenges at work. My students engage in profound conversations on topics such as privilege, unconscious bias, authenticity and leadership style as well as the business of law. They share personal experiences and ask tough questions in a safe space.

During our final class of the semester, we engage in reframing the discussion of women and

leadership from a focus on equality to an emphasis on massive business opportunity. We analyze ways that institutional norms and personal perceptions need to change to pave the way for social, political and economic equality for women.

It is my goal that at the end of the semester, my students leave knowing more about their authentic selves and their personal leadership strengths.

CK: How can the legal community help develop female leaders?

KF: It is important to recognize our own unconscious bias and try to mitigate its effects. Give time and energy to diversity and inclusivity daily with every project assignment, every formal and informal mentorship and every hiring and promotion decision that is made.

Consider female and minority candidates for every single position, promotion or point of recognition. Create and support family-friendly policies and flexibility. Champion the business case for diversity and inclusion. CL

Camille Khodadad is a principal in the labor and employment and litigation and dispute resolution practice groups at Much Shelist. She is a frequent speaker on current trends in employment law and issues pertaining to women in the workplace.

ckhodadad@muchshelist.com