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Attorneys Across America: Featuring Suzie Scanlon

By Karen West • May 01, 2014 • Careers, Features, Guest Bloggers and Profiles of Women in the Law, Superwomen JDs and What You Can Learn From Them

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Ms. JD is pleased to present a new series of blog posts focusing on women attorneys across America. From a tiny office in rural Alaska to a skyscraper in Manhattan, from The Sunshine State to The Prairie State, this series seeks to capture snapshots of successful women attorneys practicing law from sea to shining sea. We hope that the insights provided by the featured attorneys are helpful to law students and recent graduates who are navigating the job market and considering pursuing careers in



different practice areas and various geographic locations.

We start with Suzie Scanlon, Co-Founder and Managing Director of Bliss Lawyers. Ms. Scanlon is also a partner at the virtual law firm of Berger Legal LLC, where she has been practicing law for more than 10 years. Ms. Scanlon's full bio appears at the end

of this post.

1. Where do you practice law?

I practice law from a virtual law firm called Berger Legal. I work from a virtual platform which means all of the unnecessary overhead associated with the outdated "bricks and mortar" approach of costly office space and layers of unnecessary administrative staff have been eliminated. The virtual model allows me to work from my home in Connecticut so I can practice law in the same location where I raise my family.

2. Describe your legal market. What is the size of the market? How would you describe the culture?

My law firm clients are primarily Fortune 500 corporations, but I also provide legal services and solutions for start-up companies and everything in-between. The culture at the virtual law firm where I have been practicing for more than 10 years is "family first." Lawyers are never asked or expected to work when they have family obligations. The firm is comprised of 16 lawyers; 13 are women and 3 are men. We are united by our deep appreciation for providing the highest level of client service and our commitment to achieving work/life balance. In addition to practicing law at a virtual law firm, I co-own a secondment firm called Bliss Lawyers where we put high caliber lawyers in company legal departments on temporary engagements that, at times, convert into permanent ones. The culture of Bliss Lawyers, which is a new legal model, is captured by our tag line which is "Happy Clients. Happy Lawyers." The logic is that if lawyers are happy, they'll be more engaged in their work and be able to deliver top notch work to clients. We believe that happiness is an achievable goal in the legal profession based on our own personal experiences.

3. What are the industries that produce work for lawyers in your area?

Bliss Lawyers provides services across many industries including financial services, banking, media, pharmaceuticals and research and development.

4. Describe your practice area.

I practice in the field of commercial transactions and licensing in the technology industry. I also manage a variety of workflows for investment banks such as high volume drafting and negotiating of time-sensitive non-disclosure agreements, comprehensive marketing material review for hedge funds and private equity firms and execution of fund transfer documentation.

5. How did you get started in this practice area?

My practice has grown organically and has been driven by my clients' needs.

6. Do you think your practice is different because of where you live? If so, in what way(s)?

Having access to New York City has been extremely valuable to my practice and business. While I can work from anywhere in the world it is important to maintain personal contact with my clients.

7. What are good resources for women attorneys in your area?

My incredible business partner Debbie Epstein Henry is an international consultant who provides advisory, training and speaking services on workplace restructuring, talent management, work/life balance, and the retention and promotion of lawyers, with a focus on women. She hosts quarterly Law & Reorder events that are extremely informative for women and also offer meaningful networking opportunities in a comfortable, low-pressure environment.

8. What has been your hardest day on the job?

Working as a young associate and having the realization that there were no women role models based on my own personal and professional goals. I wanted to become a partner at a major firm while being involved in raising my family. I could not find women who were at the highest ranks who had achieved this balance during the 1990's. It was at that time that I realized there has to be another way to practice law at a high level while being able to be an active and present parent. It was not until eight years later that I teamed up with a virtual law firm and was able to practice law on a sophisticated level from home.

9. What has been your best day on the job?

The day I had the privilege of calling a smart, hard-working new attorney to offer him a secondment at a major investment bank in New York City. This attorney's career was derailed during the economic downturn. While he had obtained a summer associate position at a prestigious big law firm, that year only 40% of the class was extended offers due to the crisis. When we started the interview process he was working in a position that was not consistent with his career goals in an effort to pay off his student loans. During my entire career I have managed to never cry, not once, while working. I have worked for some strong, but wonderful men including Governor Mario Cuomo, Marty Lipton at Wachtell, Lipton, Joe Frumkin at Sullivan & Cromwell and Garry Berger, virtual law firm pioneer. I had heard stories from classmates and friends of extreme pressure resulting in the dreaded office cry and I always felt fortunate to have worked with great men who were supportive. However, the day I picked up the phone to make this offer of employment the reaction that I received was so overwhelming that I started to cry. Creating jobs and hiring people to work for Bliss Lawyers is the best part of my job.

10. What advice do you have for women attorneys following in your footsteps?

Networking and sponsorship are just as important as the work. If you are at a big firm and have an opportunity to attend an industry event you should attend. Often, new lawyers are focused on demonstrating their commitment through logging in billable hours and they lose sight of balancing their career with relationship building and networking. Also, maintaining a professional network on LinkedIn is a wonderful way to network without even leaving your office. I encourage all women to connect with all of their law school classmates, law firm and in-house colleagues and others that they encounter in their professional lives. In fact, if you have read this interview I would love to connect. I would be delighted to receive an invitation to connect from Ms. JD readers looking to expand their network.

11. Any additional stories, anecdotes, or thoughts on practicing in your practice area or location?

My boys who are now 15 and 14 grew up in a house where I worked from home. Instead of asking for playdates like the other kids in their elementary school classes, they would ask me to have meetings with their friends.

Bio: Prior to joining the virtual law firm world, Ms. Scanlon worked as a traditional lawyer at the law firms Sullivan & Cromwell and Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz. She also worked at the National Association of Securities Dealers (predecessor to FINRA) and in the New York State Executive Chamber of Governor Mario M. Cuomo as a Press Aide. Ms. Scanlon earned her law degree in 1995 from Fordham Law School, where she finished second in her class, served as the Annual Survey Editor of the Fordham Law Review and was the recipient of the American Jurisprudence Award for Torts and Criminal Law. She received her B.A. in medieval studies from Sarah Lawrence College in 1992 with honors. Ms. Scanlon is also a recent graduate of LaGuardia Community College's 10,000 Small Businesses

program which is a scholarship based entrepreneurship program for business owners.

Ms. Scanlon is the founding board chairperson of the Danbury Hospital Associate Board. She also serves on the LaGuardia Community College Foundation Board and is a co-chair of The Windward School Annual Fund. She has also served as Board President of Maimonides Academy of Western Connecticut, Vice President of the Board of Directors of The Ridgefield Playhouse and Executive Vice President of the Board of Trustees of Temple Shearith Israel. Ms. Scanlon has been a speaker for the New York State Bar Association, International Association of Fundraising Professionals, Association of Fundraising Professionals, New England Association for Healthcare Philanthropy and Ridgefield VNA.

A Message from the Author: This column is a Q&A - the questions above were sent to the interviewee and responses have not been edited for content. I hope you find our lineup of interviewees interesting and their input useful. If there is a female attorney you would like me to include in this blog, please contact me at attorneysacrossamerica@gmail.com and include the contact information and brief biography of the potential interviewee. I look forward to and will consider all suggestions.