

Stephanie Scharf Discusses “Walking Out the Door” Survey Research Findings and Recommendations on Lawyer2Lawyer Podcast

On a recent Lawyer2Lawyer podcast hosted by Robert Ambrogi, Stephanie Scharf joins co-author Roberta Liebenberg and ABA President Judy Perry Martinez to discuss the findings and recommendations outlined in the survey report, “Walking Out the Door: The Facts, Figures and Future of Experienced Women Lawyers in Private Practice.” The survey of 1,200 women and men at NLJ500 law firms who have been in practice for at least 15 years was sponsored by the American Bar Association and ALM Intelligence and shines a spotlight on the far less frequently discussed issue of the attrition of senior women lawyers who leave their firms when they should be in the primes of their careers.

The report is the first of its kind to provide empirical data, rather than simply anecdotal opinions and experiences, concerning the reasons why so many experienced women lawyers are voting with their feet and leaving their firms and sought to answer three related questions:

- What are the everyday experiences that contribute to the success of women and men in big firm practice?
- Why do experienced women stay in large firms and why do they leave?
- What are law firms doing to advance women into the top echelons of leadership, what actually works and where is innovation needed?

Women surveyed were far more likely than men to report factors that blocked their “access to success,” including lacking access to business development opportunities, being perceived as less committed to career and being denied or overlooked for promotion.

Male and female lawyers reported similar levels of job satisfaction regarding the intellectual challenge of their practice areas and the work they perform. But they had dissimilar levels of satisfaction regarding:

- the recognition they receive for their work
- the methods by which compensation is determined
- their opportunities for advancement
- the commitment to workplace gender diversity

- the leadership diversity of their firm.

Among the top reasons female lawyers gave for leaving the practice of law included: caretaking commitments, the level of stress at work, the emphasis on marketing or originating business and the number of billable hours.

The research showed that although firm leaders and male partners believe their firms do well in advancing experienced women, those women disagree:

- 82% of managing partners agreed that their firms were “active advocates of gender diversity,” and 91% of experienced men agreed, compared to just 62% of women.
- 84% of managing partners agreed that their firms have succeeded in promoting women into leadership, and 75% of experienced men agreed, whereas just 55% of women agreed.
- 74% of managing partners said their firms have successfully retained experienced women, and 64% of experienced men agreed, while just 47% of women agreed.

The report concludes with nine concrete recommendations for law firms to keep senior women, including:

- Develop a strategy, set targets and establish a timeline for what the firm wants to achieve.
- Take a hard look at the data, including gender metrics and statistics, to measure and track the status of key factors over time.
- Affirm leadership’s commitment to take specific actions for gender diversity.
- Take steps to ensure there is a critical mass of female partners on key committees.
- Own the business case for diversity.
- Assess the impact of firm policies and practices on female lawyers.
- Increase lateral hiring of female partners.
- Continue to implement implicit bias and sexual harassment training for all partners.
- Provide resources to relieve pressures from family obligations that women more often face than their male colleagues.

To hear the podcast, click here: <https://www.lawsitesblog.com/2019/12/walking-out-the-door-why-are-women-more-likely-than-men-to-leave-law.html>

For the full report, please go to http://www.abajournal.com/files/WALKING_OUT_THE_DOOR_-_FINAL_AS_OF_NOV_14_2019_pm.pdf