

Thank you Judge Elgo for your kind introduction. When I joined the Connecticut Asian Pacific American Bar Association (CAPABA), in 2004, Judge Elgo became the first Asian American judge in our state and the last time I shared a stage with Judge Elgo, I was presenting her with CAPABA's Impact award. So it is an honor to be introduced by a true trailblazer. Judge Elgo also officiated my wedding so it is that much more meaningful to be introduced by Judge Elgo in front of all of you, with my husband present.

To the Connecticut Bar Association's Women in the Law Section and the Young Lawyers Section, thank you very much. The ladder represents a symbol of opportunity. It is a reminder of how far we can go and how much a helping hand or even a word of encouragement can make a difference in whether we reach for opportunity. I am so honored to receive this award.

So here I am with up to 30 minutes to talk to you about my experiences as a female attorney of color and the lessons that I have learned.

However, the first lesson that I learned is that brevity in speeches is key. So, I thought that I would share the cliff notes version – here are 6 points that have had a major impact on my career.

### **1. Like who you work with**

- The percentage of unhappy attorneys is very high (over 50%).
- I think that it is important to like what you do but even more important to work with people you like.
- We all spend more time with the people that we work with than with family and friends. Finding the right place for me has been crucial. The culture of Jackson Lewis and I don't mean this to sound like an advertisement, but it has been my home for the last 12 years, is founded on excellent lawyering and collegiality. In Hartford, 14 of the 23 attorneys are female. That's 61%. And 6 of the 14 are partners. We have 3 attorneys who work part time; 1 is a partner. We have 4 attorneys of color; 3 are partners. And in addition to that, we are a diverse group in our practice areas, backgrounds, and thoughts. I drive an hour to get to work every day, each way, and am not the only one. Why? Certainly there are opportunities that are closer. But I like who I work with and that's important to me.
- It is vital to get to know the people that you work with. For example, if you want to become a partner, the partners will ultimately be voting on your elevation.

### **2. Find your tribe**

- We all have moments when we feel like a fraud. I am an unlikely attorney. I wanted to be an arson investigator or to be on a SWAT team – if you can actually believe that! There are no attorneys in my family and that is true for many of you as well. I went to law school to try it out not knowing that people don't do that. Having a sounding board, support team or your own personal board of directors, whatever you want to call it, will help you get through the difficult moments and celebrate your successes. My husband is amazingly supportive. CAPABA has been my personal support group in so many ways.

- Finding a mentor and even better, a sponsor, is critical. Your mentors and advocates most likely will not look like you. For example, according to the Vault and the Minority Corporate Counsel Association 2016 survey results, although females represent more than a 1/3 of all attorneys in law firms, only 19% of equity partners are women. While everyone is familiar with the glass ceiling, there is also the bamboo ceiling -- only 3% of equity partners are Asian and Asians are less well represented in equity ranks or at management levels than other attorneys of color. In CT, I can think of only a handful of Asian partners at large law firms. Conversely, White men comprise more than 75% of equity partners. So, the odds are very strong that your mentor will be a White male.
- My mentor has been Will Anthony for many years. Many of you know him. He has had the largest impact on my career, having hired me 12 years ago and becoming a trusted advisor and an advocate on my behalf. Our relationship grew organically in that I worked very hard on his matters and was rewarded in return. I am proof that your mentor does not need to look like you. I encourage you to find a true mentor, someone who you absolutely trust who will help you think through decisions and determine what is best for you even if it does not benefit him or her.

### **3. Learn from your failures**

- Be open to constructive criticism and work hard. A legal business is a service industry and therefore the best way for a firm to succeed is for its associates to thrive, so generally, feedback, even if you don't agree with it, is meant to help you improve. The more open you can be to feedback, the better off you will be in the long run. If feedback is not provided, ask for it. I try to take the feedback that I get, now often from clients, and use it to look for areas for me to improve upon.
- In retrospect, when I joined JL, it was questionable if I was going to make it. I was in my late 20s and had not really buckled down yet. I looked for the changes that I could make that would have the biggest impact on my life. I made two seemingly simple changes-- getting more sleep and being less flexible about my work schedule. I found that a good night sleep made a huge difference in how clear headed I was the next day and that working late resulted in me being less productive the next day yet feeling like I was working all the time when I wasn't. By evening it out, it helped me achieve greater work life balance. The little choices that you make really impact your success.

### **4. Careers are long**

- CT is a small community where everyone knows everyone. It becomes all the more critical to avoid burning bridges. Your adversary today may become a potential client 5 years from now.
- And sometimes the best advice is to remember your job today may not necessarily be your career but merely a stepping stone to get to where you want to go. For instance, I started at Arthur Andersen doing international tax. It had been really hard for me to find a job when I was in law school. So after receiving many, many rejection letters, I cold called Andersen and was fortunate to be hired. But after Enron hit, we were all laid off. I took a pay cut and went to a small plaintiff's law firm and then I took another pay cut to go to a different small plaintiff's law firm. Both pay cuts were painful with my student loans but necessary to get me to where I wanted to go. And my experience at Andersen and those two firms has been invaluable.

## **5. Get out of your comfort zone**

- There was a study that found that women will apply for an open job only if they meet 100% of the criteria whereas men will apply if they only meet 60%. While I don't know if that's true, I know that I had to be pushed into even applying for Jackson Lewis. Carlton Chen, who I'd worked with when he was at Colt's, had sent me the job opening. He knew I was looking to jump to working with employers. But I thought I needed a few more years of experience before Jackson Lewis would consider me. If Carlton had not sent me the job opening and then strongly encouraged me to apply, I would not have applied. So the lesson? Listen to your friends. Be brave. Say yes. Try different things.
- Another thought -- Don't listen to your inner critic. When I was first approached with the idea of managing Jackson Lewis' Hartford office, my initial reaction was absolutely not. I wouldn't be good at it, I didn't want to do it, I am probably not old enough, and I am way too short. Your inner critic is that inner voice that speaks up immediately and can be kind of nasty – hence the comment about needing to be taller. Obviously, I ultimately decided to do it. I reached the realization just last week that while the job is certainly not easy, I am happy with my decision. I care deeply about the firm, my office, the people that I work with, and our clients, and, I get to play a bigger role in all of that. Had I stayed in my comfort zone, I would be missing out.

## **6. Give back.**

- I've mentioned a few names of people who have helped me and continue to guide me. It is even more important to give back. Years ago, I received a picture of the back of a hand as a thank you for speaking at a UCONN BLSA event. It is a visual reminder to give back and I look at every day. In an effort to give back, I have worked with many mentees over the years. But truly, I have benefited much more than they have.

And those are the 6 points that continue to guide me. But the North Star that I have followed since I started my legal career is Gandhi's famous quote, "Be the change that you wish to see in the world."

I encourage you, when faced with the opportunity, no matter what it is, to step up and be the change that you wish to see in the world.

Thank you again for this award and the opportunity to address you this evening.