

## The 10 Best BigLaw Firms For Female Attorneys

By **Cristina Violante**

*Law360, New York (April 18, 2016, 11:05 PM ET)* -- BigLaw continues to struggle with gender equality, but 10 powerhouse firms outpaced their peers, with women comprising nearly 40 percent of their ranks, according to Law360's Glass Ceiling report.

Quarles & Brady LLP, Jackson Lewis PC, Baker & McKenzie LLP, Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith LLP, McDermott Will & Emery LLP, Ogletree Deakins Nash Smoak & Stewart PC, Shook Hardy & Bacon LLP, Akerman LLP, Wilson Elser Moskowitz Edelman & Dicker LLP and Ballard Spahr LLP are some of the 100 largest firms by U.S. headcount, according to the Law360 400, and also made the top 40 of Law360's 100 Best Firms For Female Attorneys.

On average, women make up 39 percent of these firms' total attorneys and 29 percent of their partners, as opposed to 33 percent and 22 percent in all of the firms surveyed in the Glass Ceiling report. At these firms, one in every two nonpartners is female.

While none of these firms have achieved gender parity, they are taking active efforts to address what seems to be a norm of female underrepresentation. Law360's Glass Ceiling report shows that the percentages of female attorneys at both the nonpartner and partner levels have largely remained constant over the past three years.

In order to fight this stagnation, firms must rethink their original models, according to Deborah Epstein Henry, a legal industry expert and consultant at Flex-Time Lawyers. While firm policies may not be designed to disadvantage women, many of these models are products of an earlier era when women were not a typical part of the workforce.

"The [firms] making progress aren't just providing support, but are also looking at their policies and the way the firm works as a business and saying, 'Are these policies really impacting lawyers in a consistent way?'"

Top 10 BigLaw Firms for Women	
Rank	Law Firm
1	Quarles & Brady
2	Jackson Lewis
3	Baker & McKenzie
4	Lewis Brisbois
5	McDermott Will
6	Ogletree Deakins
7	Shook Hardy
8	Akerman
9	Wilson Elser
10	Ballard Spahr

Here, Law360 looks at what these firms are doing to support, promote and retain their female talent.

### **They Take Feedback to Heart**

These 10 powerhouse firms actively seek feedback from current and former attorneys and use this input to steer policy and promote gender equality.

For instance, Quarles & Brady — the only firm on the list to have a female at the helm — is currently undertaking a survey of prior female attorneys “to figure out why people leave and what we can do better,” according to Chairwoman Kimberly Leach Johnson.

“Exit interviews are good, but people maybe aren't as candid as they would be after a year or two,” Johnson said.

Understanding why people leave is the first step in developing strategies to retain female talent, and Henry said the best strategy for this is to have an outside company perform exit interviews.

“People are afraid of burning bridges,” she said. “Firms going to outside sources are having more success.”

Firms may also survey current attorneys for feedback, after which they often consult with Henry as they grapple with what to do with the results. While polling is a helpful tool, Henry says that firms must be willing to incorporate the feedback by being transparent and sharing the results, and then taking steps to rectify the problems raised.

McDermott Will & Emery LLP is an example of a firm doing just that.

When it launched its gender diversity committee, McDermott designed its programming around the results of a firm survey, according to co-chairs of the committee, Andrea “Andie” Kramer, head of the firm’s financial products, trading and derivatives group, and Jennifer Mikulina, head of the firm's global trademark prosecution practice. The firm then used that survey to create its professional development program, what was then called McDermott University.

“If firms are going to go through the exercise of doing those surveys, they need to follow up,” Henry said. “Firms need to fully do the exercise and not take it half way.”

### **They Give Equal Work and Credit**

The most successful gender initiatives, whether through sponsorship programs or otherwise, center around giving women the opportunity to perform the same work as men and giving them the recognition for that work. A sponsorship is a reciprocal relationship between a junior attorney and a senior powerbroker, in which the sponsored attorney has “high potential that the powerbroker is willing to put his or her name behind,” Henry said.

These sponsorship programs should be assignment-based, she added, as opposed to focused merely on networking or mentoring. Giving a junior attorney a specific assignment and the opportunity to work on the same team as a powerbroker allows them to demonstrate their talent, which consequently makes a powerbroker more willing to put themselves behind the junior attorney.

Giving female attorneys equal access to assignments in such programs and initiatives and the credit for

their work would benefit the firm at large. Johnson said that when she meets with general counsels and deputies, many of whom are women who have gone in-house from law firms, she often hears that they want to give business to firms who will recognize their female attorneys.

“They say the same thing — that they want to work with a diverse group, and they say they want to send you business, but they want a woman to get credit for it,” she said.

Making sure that female attorneys have the same assignments and receive due credit also helps women secure the same promotions.

Kramer, who served on McDermott’s management committee, observed that “often, when it would come time for promotions, the women wouldn’t have all of the same credentials.”

To combat this, the gender diversity committee implemented a program through McDermott University to “be sure that every lawyer at every level is getting the same internal assignments, so that when it comes to a promotion, you can’t say, ‘Oh, you just did document review,’” Kramer said.

### **They Have an Open Path to Partnership and Leadership**

Women historically haven’t always seen a path to equity partnership, and the Glass Ceiling report shows that women are increasingly underrepresented at the highest levels.

But Jackson Lewis has worked to find ways for all attorneys to reach partnership and has the highest percentage of overall female partners of these 10 firms. The firm says its high concentration of females in partnership partly stems from the nature of employment law, in which the first client contact is usually advising, not litigation.

This “allows junior lawyers to begin client contact early on and develop relationships,” said Samantha Hoffman, co-chair of Jackson Lewis’ women’s attorney resource group and managing partner of the firm’s Orange County, California, office. “In other firms, you don’t have client contact until a few years out of law school.”

In addition to giving young attorneys hands-on experience, Hoffman emphasized that advancing female attorneys requires a top-down approach.

“Promoting women starts from the top of an organization and goes down, and it requires men to recognize women and female attorneys and provide them with those opportunities,” she said.

Similarly, Quarles & Brady has adopted an “equal opportunity” approach to promotions, according to Johnson. Whenever any position is open at the firm, it makes sure that a minority — female or otherwise — is considered.

Lewis Brisbois is likewise making progress in this arena. According to Timothy Graves, managing partner of the firm’s Los Angeles office, 40 percent of the firm’s leadership roles are held by women.

“The women in these positions are there because they have demonstrated their ability to produce exceptional work product and bring business into the firm while overseeing and encouraging others to do the same,” Graves said.

## **They Ensure Men Have a Stake**

But firms should note that gender inclusion will be most successful when it is a product of both male and female efforts and when male attorneys recognize the benefits of working on a diverse team.

At Quarles & Brady, male attorneys see female attorney support and retention as a priority, Johnson explained.

Kevin Long, chair of the firm's commercial litigation, was concerned that the firm was losing women to in-house positions, despite breaking national averages for female representation. So he instituted a "Lean In" series, where men and women had a forum for discussion "to talk through the issues."

Meanwhile, McDermott makes a point to target everyone with its diversity initiatives, according to Mikulina.

"Men have GC clients or women on their team, so it's not just about offering programing to our women," she said.

Kramer seconded this idea, saying that most men are very receptive to these issues when they realize the stake that they have.

"Senior male lawyers need to be certain that they're staffing their projects with the most talented attorneys," she said. "So we'll work hard to try to open doors."

Making a senior male attorney recognize that having a talented female on his team is an asset, as it would benefit him and boost his status, "comes back to the work," according to Henry. And with sponsorship programs, "it doesn't matter if the sponsor is a man or a woman," she said.

"Where gender and race comes in is that people go to the people who look like them because it's what's comfortable. This kind of programming is meant to disrupt that natural process," Henry said.

*Methodology: Law360 surveyed over 300 U.S. firms, or vereins with a U.S. component, about their overall and female headcount numbers as of Dec. 31, 2015. Only U.S.-based attorneys were included in the survey.*

--Editing by Christine Chun and Philip Shea.

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