

Female Powerbrokers Q&A: Rutan & Tucker's Kathy Jenson



Law360, New York (June 10, 2014, 11:37 AM ET) -- M. Katherine Jenson is an equity partner in Rutan & Tucker LLP's public law department in Costa Mesa, California. She chairs the firm's land use/natural resources practice group, which holds monthly update programs on various land use and environmental topics. She has successfully handled more than 40 California Environmental Quality Act/National Environmental Policy Act/land use cases, has numerous published decisions, and argued before the California Supreme Court on behalf of the League of California Cities in *City of Long Beach v. Department of Industrial Relations, et al.*, 34 Cal. 4th 942 (2004).

Her clients include the Port of Long Beach and the cities of Long Beach, Torrance, Burbank, Merced, Marina, and La Quinta as well as many private clients. Jenson has presented numerous programs on CEQA, land use and ethics both in-house and at numerous League of Cities conferences, the Appellate Judicial Attorneys Institute and for the Los Angeles and Orange County City Attorney Associations. She has also served as a contributing editor to the CEQA section of the League of Cities's Municipal Law Handbook.

Q: How did you break into what many consider to be an old boys' network?

A: As the youngest of five children, I grew up having to stand up for myself with my siblings. My father was a judge and my oldest brother was an attorney, so there were a lot of dynamic discussions at the dining room table. I always considered myself older than I was, and I think that made me a bit tougher than other girls my age. As an attorney, I feel that I can hold my own.

Q: What are the challenges of being a woman at a senior level within a law firm?

A: The biggest challenge is having so few female colleagues in the equity partner ranks. It is common place to be the only female in a room of mostly male partners. Mentoring new female equity partners is a real challenge, given the high bar set for all such partners. It can feel a bit lonely.

Q: Describe a time you encountered sexism in your career and tell us how you handled it.

A: Years ago, I had a sexist client. When I suggested we take a reasonable position during negotiation of a settlement agreement, he accused me of having a crush on my (male) opposing counsel. I fired him as a client. Life is too short to put up with that.

Q: What advice would you give to an aspiring female attorney?

A: Don't opt out. Be in there — in the mix. Figure out what is important to you and use your time wisely. Far too many women take themselves off track toward partnership.

Q: What advice would you give to a law firm looking to increase the number of women in its partner ranks?

A: Law firms need to be more flexible and recognize that money does not define all things. Many people, both men and women, don't mind foregoing some income in favor of a more balanced life.

Q: Outside your firm, name an attorney you admire and tell us why.

A: Presiding Justice Kathleen E. O'Leary of the Fourth District Court of Appeal, Division 3. She is a strong-willed person (nicknamed "K.O.") who has earned the respect of all of her colleagues and the entire bar in Orange County. Plus, she married one of the coolest guys around — Ken Babcock, the executive director of the Public Law Center. In two words, she rocks!

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