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"The Fruits (and Vegetables) of Your Labor"

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Resolutions for Women Looking to Get Ahead in the Legal Profession

The other day, as I was reading *The Dallas Morning News*, I saw an article written by esteemed *New York Times* nutrition writer Jane Brody headlined "Fruits, Veggies Let you Eat More, Weigh Less." I thought to myself, why is Brody, the goddess of nutrition, telling me something so obvious?

But then, a funny thing happened. I started reading the article, and my mind started honing in on all the vegetable recipes I could make. And then, to make matters worse, I clipped the article. Why I ask you, did I clip an article telling me something so glaringly obvious as the fact that one should eat a lot of fruits and vegetables?

And then it hit me: Sometimes, it's the most obvious information, the thoughts that should go without saying, that we need to be reminded of the most.

With that in mind, and with it still being the first month of a new year, I offer up "Kathleen Wu's Glaringly Obvious Resolutions for Women Looking to Get Ahead in the Legal Profession."

- Don't let the hurried pace of the world keep you from offering clients solid advice. The most valuable thing lawyers bring to the table is the ability to think problems through. We don't just press a button and produce a contract that will thoroughly protect a client. We stop and think and give our clients the benefit of our legal knowledge and our experience. When everyone in the vicinity is running 60 miles an hour and the atmosphere is frantic, turn off the alarm bells, step back and make sure you're giving clients what they're paying for: sober reflection on their legal affairs. The dividends will be huge.
- Don't let work consume you. If you haven't had a date in a year, if you haven't seen your husband for more than 15 minutes a day in you don't know how long, if your children are shocked to see you before their bedtime, it's safe to say work is taking over your life. Don't let it. Yes, the job often requires long hours, but they shouldn't be all the time. Set a few rules and stick to them – things such as family dinners at least three times a week; never miss a bedtime; and no talking about work once you walk through the front door. For single women, no spending Friday and Saturday nights at home with your DVD player and an entire season of "Sex and the City." Vow to spend one night a week *being* Carrie Bradshaw, not just watching her.
- Look for ways to create opportunities for yourself and your female colleagues. The trust is, when one woman succeeds, it helps all of us. And when one of us fails, like it or not, it reflects poorly on the rest of us. So it behooves all of us to promote – subtly and not so subtly – the women with whom we work. There are a plethora of marketing seminars geared toward women. Find the best one and convince your firm to send a group of the firm's women attorneys. Seek out the high-profile assignments and work to get other women assigned to them with you. If you're particularly ambitious, put together a marketing event geared to the firm's women lawyers and its female clients.
- Find a way to achieve your own balance: The biggest thing keeping women from reaching the highest levels of the profession is attrition. There simply aren't enough of us staying in the game long enough to become managing partner or general counsel. Not that there aren't valid reasons for this. Any woman who has juggled work, home, children and husband can testify that it's a near impossible task. Which highlights the need for women on the verge of quitting to seek out alternatives to dropping out of the workforce. Many women don't even ask for a more accommodating schedule because they assume they won't get one. While not all firms are willing to make concessions to keep a well-trained lawyer, many are. But you have to ask.

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- Take credit for your success: If you're doing well professionally – and if you've managed to make it through law school, pass the bar and get a job, you qualify – it's a safe bet you didn't get there by being pretty or lucky. You got there by being smart, determined, hard working and ambitious. It's OK to own up to the fact that you've earned your success.

I could go on, of course. The list of obvious advice is too long to be contained in one edition of *Texas Lawyer*, let alone one column. So let me just end with this one: You really should eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.