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" 'Survivor' Lessons for Young Women Lawyers; Your Skills, Not Your Smile, Lead to Success at the Firm"

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Like most firms, we recently brought on a large class of first-year associates. It's always an interesting time, observing the new recruits, evaluating their skills and personalities, and gauging their chances of making it to the hallowed halls of partnership. In a way, it feels like watching the first episode of "Survivor." Sixteen Americans were tossed off a boat near Borneo and told to paddle their way to their new home, where they would be expected to forage for food, compete in ridiculous challenges and outlast their opponents in the race for a million bucks.

Granted, none of these recruits are going to be dining on rat anytime soon—unless rat suddenly becomes a trendy entree in five-star restaurants—but the terrain isn't that dissimilar. The legal profession can be harsh, competitive and, at times, downright unpleasant. But the rewards for those who stick it out are worth far more than \$ 1 million.

For the women in this crop of new lawyers, there are some obvious lessons to be learned from "Survivor." So, in an attempt to further exploit CBS' summer phenomenon, I present to you "Survivor's Lessons for Young Women Lawyers":

Be Bossy

Being nice is fine, but success requires more than niceness: I had to cringe when many of the female castaways derided the more competitive members of the group for being "mean" and "duplicitous." The fact is, all the "nice" castaways were tossed off the island, and the Machiavellian Richard Hatch went home with \$ 1 million. In other words, nice didn't carry the day. If you go to an island to win \$ 1 million, don't criticize those who do what it takes to win \$ 1 million.

Likewise, nobody becomes a lawyer because it's viewed as the quickest way to make friends. It can be a combative profession, and you can't always be nice. Your firm didn't hire you because of your smile. They hired you because of your skills. At times, you will be required to be hard-nosed, manipulative and—heaven forbid - bossy. But your client's success is dependent on your putting away your "Miss Congeniality" award once in a while and going for the million bucks.

The world isn't always fair: As you know if you watched the show, the 16 castaways were initially divided into two "tribes," Pagong and Tagi. Once each side was whittled down to five members, the two tribes merged into one.

Four members of the Tagi tribe formed an alliance that voted as a bloc and determined who would next leave the island. Before the merger, two male members of Pagong implored their fellow tribesmen to form an alliance to prevent themselves from being picked off by the Tagis. But the female members of Pagong resisted, saying that an alliance wasn't "fair." What followed, of course, was the wholesale slaughter of Pagong.

Maybe it wasn't "fair" for the Tagi alliance to gang up on the wide-eyed Pagongers. But when the object of the game is to boot the other island inhabitants, you have to be prepared to take your gloves off.

It's all about men: Likewise, I often hear new women lawyers complain about the inherent unfairness of the legal profession and its favoritism toward men, e.g. most general counsel are men; golf, which men particularly love, is viewed as a key to business generation; most large firms are still dominated by men, etc.

Well, it is what it is, fair or not. We can either learn to thrive in this environment or we can spend our time whining about it. I choose the former, frankly, and the more of us that do that, the better our chances of eventually changing the system to one more favorable to women.

The Goal

You have to have a goal to ever achieve one: One of the banished castaways, Colleen Haskell, redeemed herself in my eyes when, in the aftermath of her banishment, she admitted to an interviewer that she hadn't gone onto the game with a

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goal, and that's why she lost. She tried out for "Survivor" on a lark and viewed it as one big adventure, rather than the competition that the rest of her teammates saw it as. Probably because she wasn't viewed as much of a threat and kept her head down, she made it pretty far—the sixth from the last to get ousted.

Once she was a few weeks into the competition, though, she realized that she actually stood a chance to win a million dollars, and she started to throw herself into the competitive spirit of the game. But it was too late. She was the last of her tribe, and she was marked for death. Had she set her sights on the prize a bit earlier, she might be the one celebrating instead of Richard.

I know it's hard for new lawyers to know where their careers are going to take them, and many bow out of the race for partnership early on. Which is fine. Partnership isn't for everybody. But, like Colleen, if you don't know what you want to achieve, you'll probably never get there. For my money, being able to say that I'm the best lawyer I can possibly be is an invaluable reward. For others, nothing can beat being named to the U.S. Supreme Court. Whatever your goal is, you actually have to have one before you can ever achieve it.

So there you have it, my lessons from "Survivor." Yes, it was just a game, but, in the end, isn't everything?

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