

## Articles

### "How I Spent My Weekend in the Mountains (Or, How Single Dads Can Save the Legal Profession)"

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Texas Lawyer  
October 25, 1999

Originally appeared in **TEXAS LAWYER**.

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So, I just got back from spending the weekend in the Colorado Rockies with Tom Cruise.

Well, not so much with him personally. But he was there at the same time I was. Actually, I didn't see him with my own eyes, but one of the women I was there with saw him.

OK, so I might not have had any one-on-one time with Tom and Nicole, but I did get some quality time with executives and in-house counsel from some of the country's biggest companies.

Between the mountain hikes, the massages, pedicures and lavish meals, I and dozens of other lawyers from my firm managed to do quite a bit of bonding with some of the most important executives in the nation.

Did I mention that we were all women?

I've said it before and I'll say it again, women schmooze differently than men. And law firms need to recognize that. Fortunately, mine does. Lest this come off as one big Andrews & Kurth ad, some other firms are getting on this particular bandwagon as well. I hear New York's Skadden Arps recently had an all-female shindig, and I understand some other Texas firms have similar events in the works as well.

Nevertheless, the default "business development events" at most firms are sporting events, which, sexist though it may seem to assert, are still predominantly male-oriented.

The weekend I just returned from was the second such gathering Andrews & Kurth has sponsored for its women attorneys and clients. It was held at The Peaks Resort & The Golden Door Spa outside Telluride, Colo., and it was a smashing success. It was bigger than the last retreat we did at The Broadmoor Spa in Colorado Springs. And this time, we also included the female clients of our male attorneys.

Roughly 100 women attended the Telluride event—both lawyers and their clients and potential clients—and I was initially nervous that all these women, many of whom didn't know more than one or two other people there, wouldn't hit it off, that the dinner conversation would be filled with pregnant pauses and lots of, "So, the weather sure is nice here, huh?"

I didn't need to worry. The din at dinner was such that you would have thought the gathering was a family reunion instead of a group of relative strangers. (The enthusiasm was even more remarkable, considering the fact that many of us were suffering from wicked cases of altitude sickness. Let that be a lesson to other firms planning retreats: sea level is good.)

Did we talk a lot of business? No. Do I think the relationships that began or were solidified during the retreat will turn into business? If the last retreat was any indicator, I would have to give a resounding yes.

Women are no different than men in this account. We want to do business with people we like and with whom we feel some kind of a bond. Weekends like ours in Telluride do an awful lot to foster those bonds.

## Articles

Which brings me to another important issue: Retreats like these don't happen because one or two women at the firm think it's a good idea. Trust me, events like these aren't cheap. Retreats like these happen because someone at the top of the firm—someone who is more than likely a male—thinks it's a good idea and is willing to stick his neck out and support it.

This is the case at our firm, and it absolutely must be the case anywhere women hope to shatter glass ceilings and succeed in large numbers.

### **Full Support**

Much as I'd like it to be otherwise, women, acting individually, can't bring about much change in the legal profession. In order for revolutionary change in the profession—and I believe that is what is needed—men need to get on the bandwagon and actively support the women in their firm. And they need to do it not because they're nice guys, but because it is essential to the long-term health of the profession and the individual firms that make it up.

One encouraging sign is the recent ascension of a woman to the chairmanship of Baker & McKenzie, the world's second-largest law firm.

But an even more important development occurred in the corporate world, at Hewlett-Packard. No, I'm not talking about the selection of Carly Fiorina to the CEO spot, though that's certainly something to cheer about.

The more important development at HP was the tenure of her predecessor, Lewis Platt. Because of a personal tragedy, the premature death of his wife, Platt was thrown into the role of single parent at the same time he was beginning to climb the corporate ladder.

Without his wife tending the home front, Platt was forced to juggle child rearing, homework help, housekeeping and a full-time job. Until that time, he told *The New York Times*, he had assumed that any difficulties women had in the workplace were of their own making. His single-parent status left him with a new understanding of the working mother's plight.

When he took over as CEO (a second marriage allowed him to return to his workaholic ways), he didn't just give lip service to work and family issues. He declared it one of the company's top priorities. Instead of merely offering alternative schedules, which most people don't take advantage of because they fear retribution, HP began actively encouraging employees to arrange flexible schedules or telecommute. They can even take sabbaticals—yearlong, unpaid leaves from the company—no questions asked.

The changes didn't merely make HP a nicer place to work. It practically halted the company's turnover. Before Platt's changes, women left the company—like they do so many others—in droves, choosing their families over their careers. Afterward, their turnover rates were almost identical to men's. According to *The New York Times*, HP now loses fewer than 5 percent of its employees each year, compared with an industry average of 17 percent.

Statistics like those are pretty startling. And they're proof that what's needed in the legal profession and elsewhere is more than just grudging acknowledgement by firm leadership of work and family considerations. What we need are a few more single dads.