

# Daily Journal

COVER STORY

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## Top Women Litigators

### Leaps of Faith

#### Editor's Note

This year, we asked our honorees to consider a single turning point in their careers, a moment when success hinged on abandoning the familiar for the unknown.

Maybe it was forgoing a potentially lucrative career in another field. Perhaps it was diverging from a family practice to pursue a government job. Or it could have been assuming the lead chair in a complex trial.

As could be expected, the answers varied widely. But the message was clear. Most if not all of these remarkable women faced a point in their lives when doubt was the enemy, a moment that required unwavering faith in their abilities or judgment.

In many cases, sheer determination spawned a revelation or opportunity. It was clear: These advocates have achieved great success by confronting the unknown.

But the exercise also created a sort of blueprint, a road map for generations rising through the ranks of the legal profession.

Some of our honorees said their journeys had nothing to do with leaps — of faith or otherwise.

"The question is, 'Can I prove it?'" explained Los Angeles defense attorney Gigi Gordon. "A leap of faith is antithetical to the entire legal process, as it requires acquiring a belief without any empirical support."

Of course, many of our honorees continue to grapple with not just leaps into the unknown, but moving through all-too-familiar terrain. Studies continue to show that women still account for less than 20 percent of all law firm partners. At the same time, they are jumping off the track to partnership at far higher rates than their male counterparts.

Indeed, though we like to think otherwise, equality between the sexes remains largely a myth. After all, how do we explain the fact that women abandon the pursuit of partnership largely because they are too busy juggling the duties of child care. Forget Mr. Mom — Women still rule the roost.

As a result, the path to success is often fraught with gender-specific hurdles.

Today's challenges remind us that bridging the gap between the known and the unknown requires courage and tenacity. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the following pages, where many of the state's top women litigators shared those defining moment in their careers, when they leaped into the unknown purely on the belief, as so many of them told us, "that I could do it."

— Dan Schechner

#### Nina (Nicki) Locker

Palo Alto

Place of Birth: New York

Law School: Stanford Law School

Law Firm: Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati

Practice Area: Securities litigation and counseling

Years in Practice: 22

Nicki Locker just scored a big win in Washington, D.C. — but she's not dishing details.

"When you work with the SEC and have a major victory, you often can't talk about it," the Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati partner said. "You can't use people's names."

Locker did provide a sketch of one recent success. While representing a chief financial officer and CEO of a public company who was about to be charged with securities-fraud violations, Locker asked for a meeting with the head of enforcement at the Securities and Exchange Commission. Her legal team made a presentation on the client's behalf and persuaded the commission to conclude its investigation without filing charges.

Locker's other clients include Brocade Communications, Juniper Networks, McAfee and medical-technology company Guidant.

Locker, a native of Queens who retains her East Coast accent, began her career in intellectual property, but switched to securities litigation during the early 1990s.

"I realized I wasn't going to be as successful if I stayed doing IP," she said. "I didn't have a tech background."

With the help of her firm, Locker retooled herself as a securities litigator. It was a leap of faith that paid off.

"I have a great practice and great clients," she said. "No one really says, 'Nicki who?' anymore."

Of switching practice areas, Locker adds: "It was the best decision I ever made, other than marrying the right man. That was a leap of faith, too."

— Amelia Hansen



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