THE PRESENT IS FEMALE

The 2019 Diversity Survey highlights women in leadership roles
Half of Illinois' 20 largest firms are headed by women – here's what they had to say

BY CHICAGO LAWYER STAFF
When Baker & McKenzie managing partner Regine Corrado showed up for her first day at work at a small firm in Hamburg, Germany, she was shown her new desk — in the typing pool.

“They said, ‘We never had a female attorney, and we don’t think women should have offices, so here’s the typing pool,’” Corrado said.

In the late 1990s, then-associate Britt Miller was one of two women at a 25-person joint defense meeting at a law firm in Washington, D.C. The other woman was a paralegal.

“One of the men in the meeting turned, he had no idea who I was, and he asked me to get him a cup of coffee,” said Miller, who was named managing partner of Mayer Brown’s Chicago office in January. “I was a little taken aback but I thought ‘OK, fine. I was going to get a cup for myself. Not a big deal.’ I kind of laughed internally because it was going to be amusing when he finally realized who I was.”

Miller said it was amusing. And the man apologized profusely.

But being a woman in Big Law brings opportunity as well.

“I received a cold call from a woman in-house lawyer who knew of me by reputation and asked me to substitute in for the company’s long-standing class-action counsel in a major class action,” said Marci Eisenstein, managing partner of Schiff Hardin.

“The lawyer I was asked to replace was a male partner at a large firm who did not listen to his female client, who felt he knew better and who declined to work or consult with a female subject-matter expert the client had assigned to the team. The in-house counsel was tired of feeling marginalized and turned to me. I listened, worked with her and her team and it was the start of a 20-year relationship that continues through today.”

Ten of the 20 largest firms in Illinois — including five of the top 10 — have women as managing partner, partner-in-charge or co-managing partner of their Chicago offices. But those numbers aren’t reflected down the line, according to the results of Chicago Lawyer magazine’s 2019 Diversity Survey of the 100 largest firms in Illinois. You’ll find those results starting on Page 28.

We spoke to all 10 on topics ranging from the programs their firms offer to retain and promote women to their own experiences as women in law. Here’s what they had to say.

Quotes have been edited for length and clarity.

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We know that developing a future generation of women leaders starts with a solid pipeline out of law schools. We created a panel interview process for law students and lateral associates that uses standardized behavioral interview questions. It was specifically designed to mitigate the implicit biases that can plague more “traditional” interview formats. We also remain focused on increasing gender diversity in our lateral partner hiring. In the past two years, 75% of our equity partner hires have been women, and women now represent 23% of the equity partnership. More than 20 years ago, Schiff Hardin established the Women’s Networking Group to create opportunities for women lawyers at the firm. The group hosts career advancement and mentoring programs, internal and external networking events and a wide range of business development initiatives.