

Spotlight On... Meredith Elkins

Recent 2021 Women Worth Watching in Leadership Award Winner, Meredith Elkins, sat down for a quick one-on-one to give us her thoughts about the future of hiring in the legal industry and how the pandemic has shifted her relationships with her clients. Check out the Q&A below:

As hiring partner at Cohen Ziffer, do you witness that gender bias is still a concern of younger women lawyers you've interviewed or that you encounter?

Unfortunately, absolutely yes. There's a reason women are leaving the workforce in such drastically higher numbers than men – and it's even worse for women of color. Women want to work in an environment where they are respected, appreciated, challenged, and offered equal opportunities. We also want to have a support system, both at home and in the office. I see how this still impacts younger lawyers in the great enthusiasm both men and women have for working at a firm like ours that is run by a strong, successful female leader like Robin Cohen.

What positive shifts have you seen in gender bias, or in diversity and inclusion generally since you started your legal career?

Recognizing the problem is huge, though it's only the first step. The concepts of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging have come to the forefront recently and made it easier to have hard conversations about what needs to improve. For working parents, we've seen better parental leave policies and I hope we continue to see increased flexibility in work schedules and locations to allow parents, women especially, to do both well.

What hasn't evolved far enough that is ripe for change?

The legal profession still has far too few women and people from marginalized groups in partnership or other leadership positions. Firms can't solve that problem solely by recruiting laterally – we have to

grow internally by mentoring and nurturing young lawyers and creating environments where they can thrive long term.

Do you think the lawyer-client relationship has shifted or evolved because of the pandemic? If yes, how has it changed?

If anything, my relationships with my clients have improved. We talk more often and are able to connect “face to face” virtually as much as needed. We have clients all over the world and the shift to remote meetings and court appearances has allowed our clients to feel more connected to their legal teams and their cases. Someone who may not have traveled for a hearing can now watch it remotely, see their attorney in action, and hear their adversary’s and the judge’s impressions of the case. That familiarity leads to lawyers and clients working more closely together and feeling like a unified team.

At this stage of your career, what is the first piece of advice you’d give a young lawyer of any gender just starting out?

Set and communicate your boundaries. The most successful, and happiest, lawyers love their jobs and their lives outside work – it’s not impossible! Knowing your own boundaries and communicating them early allows you to be fully present at work and give your best, and then take necessary time to rest, pursue outside passions, and cultivate relationships. And communicating early and often is the best way to learn if you’re meeting expectations and how to excel.

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Meredith Elkins