

Women's History Month Spotlight: 'Know What Style and Strategy Is Your Strength'

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March is Women's History Month, and to celebrate The Legal Intelligencer interviewed some prominent women in the legal industry to share their insights on their challenges, support and successes within this space. These women come from different backgrounds, regions and law firms throughout the country, but they all share two things in common: to reach their ultimate career goals and to help their female colleagues achieve their professional accomplishments as well.

Ashley Yorra is a partner with Vial Fotheringham in the firm's Lake Oswego, Oregon office. Practicing for over 15 years, Yorra focuses on real estate law. She regularly handles general HOA law, collections and foreclosures. She thoroughly understands the priorities, needs and perspectives of Oregon HOA boards concerning legal matters. Helping HOAs navigate owner disputes, interpreting and amending governing documents, collecting on delinquent fees/dues, helping HOA boards prioritize funding for large repair or replacement projects, and foreclosing on liens are the main focuses of Yorra's legal practice.

Question: What inspired you to pursue a career in the legal industry?

Answer: Both my grandfather and father were lawyers. They helped show me the difference lawyers make in people's lives. I was 6 when I first declared I would be a lawyer. However, after college, I 'wasn't sure I wanted to be a lawyer, and I spent three years in other

positions. While working at a title company, the owner convinced me that with my skill set, I 'couldn't pass up the opportunity to become a lawyer.

Q: How do you support future generations of women lawyers?

A: A few big items pop into my head that my firm does: 1. mentoring young attorneys; and 2: supporting parents. After looking at the statistics and seeing many women lawyers leave the practice of law after having children, I have lobbied to support parents at the firm. I promoted several initiatives at the firm, including creating a nursing lounge and ensuring that there were options to retain income while on maternity/paternity leave. I also think 'it's critical to acknowledge that supporting fathers also helps support mothers. If any lawyer wants to be a stay-at-home parent—there's no judgment—but if you want to continue working, the law is a demanding field, and parents need supportive work environments.

Further, my firm has encouraged me to continue teaching at the law school. I teach a negotiation class and help train students to become great lawyers. Seeing successful women helps students realize there are pathways to becoming a successful woman attorney.

Q: Who is your most significant mentor, and what lessons have you learned from them?

A: Unfortunately, I have had few female lawyer mentors. However, I have an amazing mentor who happens to be a male lawyer. My mentor allowed me the space to ask any question and be professionally vulnerable, all without judgment (this is one of the most significant gifts any mentor can give to a young lawyer). This created a safe space to learn and hone my craft as a lawyer and see other points of view.

Q: Tell us about some matters you have worked on. Why are they interesting?

A: I practice Condominium and Homeowner Association Law, mainly representing the Associations. Interesting matters I've worked on include finding proof a "lady of the night" was conducting her commercial business out of her unit in violation of the Association's governing documents, advising an association how to bring control to the over-the-top competing political signs between neighbors; and running Association meetings where violent physical fights occur. Some of my matters are very interesting—and some are simple and run of the mill. The varied matters I work on always keep my days interesting.

Q: What advice would you give women entering the industry?

A: Be yourself. It sounds simple, but in practice, it means figuring out your strengths and weaknesses and then using those to your advantage. Not every lawyer is the same. Be self-aware and know what style and strategy is your strength. And know where your weaknesses are so you can strengthen those areas AND know when you are in over your head.