

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

Lisa Perrochet

Encino

Place of Birth: Los Angeles

Law School: Loyola Law School

Law Firm: Horvitz & Levy

Practice Area: Appellate

Years in Practice: 20

Talk about a leap of faith. In September, Lisa Perrochet told her client, the city of San Diego — which faced damages of \$150 million besides a \$1 billion deficit — that the legal strategy she had chosen was successful between 10 percent and 20 percent of the time.

Then, she won, obtaining a ruling that no substantial evidence supported a developer's reverse-condemnation claim against the city.

"If we had lost, it would have been a disaster for the city," she said.

Next up for the 44-year-old appellate specialist are more appeals, including those on behalf of clients facing \$15 million in asbestos personal-injury damages and punitive damages in a real estate fraud case.

Her biggest leap of faith, she jokes, was deciding to go into appellate law right out of law school. She's been in the practice area — and at the same firm — ever since.

"When I heard that there was a legal specialty that allowed you to research and write for a living, I thought, 'That's for me,'" she said. "I love the academic exercise, the intellectual exchange and the relative lack of rancor. Some people find the practice isolating — you don't have those moments of glory in front of a jury — but we can really focus on the hardcore legal questions, and I think that's great."

— Rebecca Beyer



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