



RAISING THE BAR FOR WOMEN

Jami McKeon Discusses Her Career, Inequality, Business Generation, and #MeToo

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McKeon – who started at Morgan Lewis in 1981 and rose to the top spot at the firm in 2014, making Morgan Lewis the largest law firm in the world led by a woman – doled out the advice as she spoke about developing a successful legal career as a woman, but it's easy to see how the wisdom could apply to just about any industry.

Over the course of the 45-minute long interview with Philadelphia Business Journal reporter Jeff Blumenthal, McKeon spoke about what it was like for her coming up through the legal industry including what it was like to have children when she was starting out in the '80s and again as a partner in the '90s. She also touched on why it's better to not think about rising into management ranks when starting out, what it's like interacting with international clients from different cultures as a woman and the powerful way implicit bias can hold women back in the workplace without them even realizing it's happening.

Morgan, Lewis & Bockius Chair Jami Wintz McKeon has reached the pinnacle of her profession – leading one of the world's 10 largest law firms. She is the only woman to hold that distinction.

During an interview last week at the Philadelphia Business Journal's Women in Law Conference, she discussed her 37-year climb up the ladder at Morgan Lewis, her thoughts about why women are leaving law firms, what are the best compensation systems for female lawyers and advice

about business generation.

While the topic was women in law, McKeon's thoughts are easily transferrable to any business or organization.



I've been covering law for 20 years and so much has changed. But one thing that's stayed the same is that

50 percent of all law school graduates are women and less than 20 percent of equity partners are women. Why do you think that the needle hasn't moved? I think in the early days, law firms were quick to bring women into the associate ranks and very slow to move them to partner. And as women left firms, the constant refrain was that it was for 'work-life balance' that they wanted to go have children and didn't want to work as hard. So, there was this mindset that women just aren't prepared to make the commitments that men are prepared to make.

Then as that mindset started to shift, we saw a phenomenon that really has changed in my time. In the first several years in my practice I had not one client that had an in-house lawyer, not one. We represented major companies and corporations and I was dealing with vice presidents, people in the C-suite.

Then our clients started to build up in-house legal teams and they built them up with people who look like all of us. So, women finally had an attractive alternative, a place to go where it didn't have to be in a law firm or nothing; it could be a law firm, or the government or other clients.

So, [companies] started to compete with our clients, frankly, for really talented women. Then as more women went in-house with our clients and as society changed and recognized the value in diversity, our clients are now demanding, again, more of law firms, that they field more diverse teams. And that combined with the availability of technology and the fact that people can juggle things more. Our incoming partnership class of 30-some people is half women. So, you are again seeing that firms are trying to make this work for women and some of the old policies are falling by the wayside, but we still compete with our clients. It still is a challenging and demanding life.

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Morgan, Lewis & Bockius

Clients are key to moving that needle. Do you think that they are pushing firms enough? Absolutely. Let me give a couple really concrete examples. So there are clients who basically say to their law firms, 'If you don't do X you'll fall off our panel.' We have one client that has picked its 12 top law firms and has an initiative and is a

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very organized and well-run initiative to take at least 50 percent of the ladies who work at this extremely large institution and have it led by a woman. Not women on the team, not early roles or marking up documents. Led by women. And so, clients are increasingly demanding that.

The other thing that I would say to clients and I think we're finally starting to do this, but I encourage everyone in the room to do this: If you want to see more women and lawyers of color leading your teams, call the person who you want leading the team directly. Don't call a relationship partner and say, 'Gee, I'd like to see more of this.' If you decide that [Morgan Lewis partner] Meredith Auten is the bomb, then call Meredith next time that you have matters that you want handled and then call me and tell me that you're calling Meredith. But I think clients are increasingly doing that.

Do you have any examples of this happening at Morgan Lewis? We had a situation a couple years ago where there were two relatively senior associates working with me on a very broad client engagement that involved many, many lawyers. And one of the people that the client was dealing with was a very difficult person, very hard to please, didn't like anybody. But she liked these two women associates. So, I went for a talk with her one day and I said, 'I'll tell you what, you send work to them and I will supervise it at no cost. And you will sort of give them the opportunity.' Well those women are both now partners at our firm. One made last year and one we made the year before and it is because they were able to demonstrate they were able to generate client work

and confidence because the client was giving them work. But I put my finger on the scale with that and I think law firms and lawyers need to be really thoughtful about that and notice that there are times when people show great potential and find a way to pull that person up instead of just assuming that, you know, by his or her own merit that will arise. It doesn't always work like that.

What do you think are some of the best compensation methods for women?

I have a very strong opinion about this topic. It won't surprise people to know that I think the system we use is the best for women or else we would change it. But I [have seen studies] that suggest that subjective systems are bad for women. I completely reject that because I think that the old law firm model that's based on metrics and numbers in somebody's column perpetuates sort of whoever is in power, not only wanting to stay in power but continuing to get the most compensation and get the most control and anything that entrenches old power structures is not going to be good for women.

So, in our system we evaluate everything: Things that you work on, things that you bring in, things that you send to other people, the hours that you spend, the pro bono that you do, the leadership roles that you have, and it is a subjective decision on the compensation committee, which is made up of seven people and which I chair. We spend about three months going over and discussing the contributions of every single person and it is based on the contribution as a whole and that allows us to look at a woman who does not have \$10 million in

her column because this particular client has worked with somebody, you know, for years and years and years and say she isn't any less key to that relationship.

And so, I really think that subjective systems that take into account the entire contribution are better. Now if it's subjective, blackbox, some guy gets to decide, and nobody knows why, I don't think that's good for anybody and certainly not good for women. But a system that truly takes into account your contribution as a whole and your value to the firm allows you to have compensation that is not based simply on whether or not you control XYZ.

What advice do you have for women about business generation?

In some ways it's a lot easier to generate business now than it was, because there was a time where business transactions sort of changed hands almost exclusively on the golf courses or in clubs women couldn't go too. I remember when I worked in the Fidelity Building we had our meetings in the Union League, and I had to go in the back door because women couldn't be part of the Union League.

Now things have changed a lot. There are many more and different ways for people to connect. It has become much more common to have events that are more friendly in terms of breakfasts, lunches, dinners. I know a lot of women who are really effective about getting out on social media their expertise in certain areas.

I still do believe that to be really good at what you do and building relationships with clients even if they're not 'yours' will benefit you because those clients increasingly feel empowered to

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go to the lawyers they want. There are very few places anymore where clients feel like, 'Oh I can't call back someone I think is great because I have to call fill-in-the-blank.' Most clients feel very empowered to do that. And more and more the people in our client numbers are people who came from all of us. So, building relationships with people who leave your firm ... You're a third-year associate and somebody leaves and goes to a client. In a couple years that person is going to be generating business and so the relationship can be built.

If you're in a firm where it is not valued for you to build relationships with clients because it's 'somebody else's clients' then my advice is change your firm. Because you will never succeed at a place that rewards people for hoarding relationships. You should be some place where people are saying, 'Oh, thank god, that Michelle is going and meeting with that client regularly and taking that person to lunch and how can I involve her more in what I'm doing?'

We all have to start somewhere. And for Jami McKeon, it was 37 years ago after graduating from Villanova University School of Law, when she first entered the doors of Morgan, Lewis & Bockius –the nearly 2,000 lawyer firm where she now serves as chairwoman.

During an interview last week at the Philadelphia Business Journal's Women in Law Conference, McKeon reflected back to the earlier years of her career to discuss the issues women faced back then and how things have changed since that time.

Did anything happen early in your career to surprise you in terms of the way you were treated? Nobody inside the firm, I felt, ever looked at me differently because I was a woman. In fact, I would say the one thing was a benefit which is I didn't kind of look or act like everybody else, so I didn't feel like I had to be in anybody else's footsteps. So, I think internally I was surprised that there was no real distinction. Externally it was different: Opposing counsel, judges, there were a lot of people out there who would try to intimidate you because you were a woman- and I was young, I was 23 at the time. Or people would, I think, expect less of you and would make assumptions: That you weren't as tough, as smart, as good. Many times, I felt that ... but internally I was good. So, I became pregnant in my second year and we had no maternity policy. There were 12 of us who sat and had coffee on the floor of somebody's office and went to our office managing partner and said, 'We think we should have a three-month paid leave.' And he said, 'Sounds good to us.' That's really all there was. So, I didn't see that as much in the earlier years I think as maybe evolved over time. In the early stages when women were sort of a novelty in big firms, people were just kind of looking to see how this was going to work out. When people started to get senior enough that they were eligible for partnership, the old model of big law firms and kind of the hand-me down work and relationships and those kinds of things started to really disadvantage women.

You had kids at two different parts in your life: In the '80s when you were an

associate and then in the '90s when you were a partner. Did it evolve in a positive way? Personally for me when I had my first two children in the '80s, there were no Blackberrys, no laptops, no home computers, no research you could do outside of the office. You took a three-month maternity leave and you didn't do anything. Like you didn't see anybody, nobody called you, nobody expected you to do any work. You were home, you took your time off and you came back. There was also no part-time available, so you had no decisions to make other than you're going back to work or you're not. When I was a partner it was actually much harder for me because at that time I was a leader at a local practice group, I had client responsibilities, there was some connectivity- things like voicemail. But [you still] couldn't take your laptop home and go work from home. So, I had clients calling me two weeks after I had a child because of matters I was handling, and I was trying to work from home and I couldn't really work from home. Because you have responsibilities, you couldn't just say- I mean I never said to a client, 'Sorry I'm taking three months.' So that was much more challenging for me personally.

Where are we now with that issue? Though attitudes have really changed a lot and the changes in technology have been both the best thing that happened in our profession and the worst; for women and for men... You can put your children to bed and go back online. You can actually go home instead of deciding, 'Tonight I can't go home.' You don't have to go back to the office. You can actually field an emergency call no matter where you are.

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You can put your kids to bed and you can be in touch. The negative is you can be in touch all the time, right? But for things like maternity leave or coming back, now people work part-time, we have a ramp-up program at Morgan Lewis. We have a remote working program where people can work from home a couple days a week. So, I think it's much more hospitable working climate than it used to be. On the other hand, I think there's a challenge that we as a profession... When I came back from maternity leave nobody cared if I had good childcare or anything. It was, 'We're going to St. Louis for a trial, right?' And the thought was sort of, 'Hey if you want to do this, you know jump in.' Now we have a lot of people who are very worried about being in touch and socially correct. So, they look at that woman who comes back from maternity leave and they say, 'Well I'm not asking Adrienne to go away for three months because she's got a little baby and I don't want to be a jerk.' So, Adrienne gets to sit in her office, you know, reviewing documents. Meanwhile John is off in St. Louis with a big victory, spending time with clients. Coming back everybody's talking about how great he did. Three years later Adrienne is still marking up documents in her office and she is one of the people that leaves the profession not because women want work-life balance. I'm pretty passionate about that, I don't know any one woman who's not willing to work hard. But if you don't think you're going to get somewhere, if you're not growing in your profession- you don't think you have opportunities then all the stress - financial, emotional and otherwise - of working just isn't worth it.

We really need to have very open

communication about what people want, what they expect, whether they want to work part-time, what part-time means, whether women go off trials. Because a lot of places make assumptions about what women want without communicating with the woman in question.

Attorneys have been part of #MeToo movement from early on, though lawyers' involvement in the viral campaign to end sexual harassment and assault goes beyond representing clients. Morgan, Lewis & Bockius Chair Jami McKeon told the Business Journal during our Women in Law conference on how #MeToo could impact her profession, as well her advice for women interested in climbing the ladder to management roles and the sacrifices required for success.

Obviously something that's been in the headlines a lot is the #MeToo movement. Has it trickled down in the legal industry? Well it's definitely trickled down to the legal industry in part because the legal industry has such a role to play here. My partner who heads our employment group represents many of the Fortune 50 and many of the top law firms in the country in trying to come up with solutions and, you know, kind of a way to deal with these issues. It's maybe people are more willing to speak up, it's maybe people are more conscious, but ... it's like everything else in life, which is there's always kind of a yin and a yang. And now the dialogue has turned to, 'Well will men mentor women less? And be afraid to mentor women because they're afraid of the backlash?' We've

been pretty direct about that internally at our firm which is, people are not being accused of misbehavior because they asked someone to pass the salt and it was misinterpreted, right? I mean this is not that hard. The kind of things that are getting people in trouble are behaviors that everybody knows are inappropriate behaviors and ... the majority of people at our firms who never in a million years would have this issue or this problem. So, I don't think all of a sudden people need to be worried. I think the opposite is true: We have to make clear to people that you have to continue to mentor great women. It is not only the right thing to do, but for the reason we talked about before, it's a business inherited. We have clients who are expecting to see us to have talented, executive women at the top of our teams and they don't get there if they don't have mentoring. Every mentor I had was a man. I wouldn't be sitting here, much less in the job I'm in, if I didn't have great male mentors. So, we all have to mentor each other. There just aren't enough senior women to go around and mentor everybody. So, we really have to have the men in our firms be allies and be mentors as well.

What advice would you give young women who want to become partner or get into management? First of all, I would begin by saying no one should ever aspire to be a manager, right? ... I actually mean it because that's not where your head should be. Every woman I know who's in a management position at any firm got there because she was a phenomenal, outstanding lawyer with strong client relationships. For better

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or for worse, you can't lead a law firm without having people think that you're really a good lawyer and without having people respect your contribution to the law. So first of all, anything you do, you have to be really good at what you do. And that is what your primary focus should be in the early days of your career... observing, learning a lot, doing a great job, showing up, being available, participating. I always say to people, 'Having a seat at the table is only 10 percent of the challenge. It's what you do with that seat.' Second, I would say is it really is a marathon not a sprint. You know there are going to be really great years and really great moments, and then there are periods where it just doesn't feel fantastic and that's not because you're a woman or you have children, or you don't have children. That's just because it's life. You know I've been at my firm for 37 years and I'd never go to another firm, I have the best career of anyone I know, I've had periods of time where I was not really feeling thrilled with my life. So, you really have to look at it as a long haul. And then I would say, you know, really focus on being a good colleague and being connected to other people. There's a lot of reasons for that. ... That technology has connected us together but isolates us because we don't even have to walk down the hall to talk to somebody we work with. We can be doing everything online. We can be running out of the office to get home to our kids' things, but then we're not sitting, eating pizza on the floor for the fifth night in a row with all the other people or having cartwheel competitions down the hall in the Fidelity Building which I did as a

young associate.

How has all this applied to your life outside of the office? My husband has just finished a master's in applied psychology at Penn because we thought having two children and two grandchildren, a kid graduating from college – what it wasn't enough for us? We thought we should complicate our lives further. He did this master's and it was really great because he took a lot of things away from that I think we all know, but that are really important in this time where in our profession there are real concerns about depression, substance abuse, wellness, all those things. One of the things he really took away from it was, the times when you are most wanting to pull into yourself are the times where it is most important to reach out. The more complicated your life is, the harder you're working, the more you've got [to do], the more important it is that you be connected to other people and too many people just put their heads down and work and don't realize that having a sense of community, not only will help you do better in your job, it will make you feel better about your job and will make it more likely that you stick it out for a longer period of time.

When the firm acquired the members from Brobeck you picked up your life, your husband and your kids, and moved to Northern California. And then became chair of the litigation department, which has hundreds of lawyers all over the world. How did you balance your life? I don't think I thought of that as a lot of sacrifice, I thought of

it as an opportunity and I do think a little bit of it is how we look at it. We expanded into Northern California, we opened in Silicon Valley, San Francisco, Orange County and expanded in L.A. with a whole team of lawyers whose firm had just collapsed. It was a fantastic firm, one that people were very proud about and was really key to their identity, and it became clear pretty early on that it would benefit them and benefit the firm if somebody from our leadership team was out there. At the time our older two kids were in college, my younger two kids were still home, my husband was in biotech– Northern California wasn't a bad place for biotech and we thought it was the thing to do so we moved out there for eight years [from 2004 to 2012.] I do say to people – If you're going to try to have a family, if you're going to try to have a career, if you're going to try to do all those things, you need two things: One is intestinal fortitude and one is superior childcare. You can go to work and do well, [but] if you're fighting with your significant other, but if you're not sure whose picking up your kid, you are sunk. But the intestinal fortitude piece is that was pretty intimidating in some ways to go into a place where nobody really knew me. I wasn't reporting to anybody else. I had no real, official role. You just have to have a belief that, ultimately, if you really put forth the effort and care about it – not just do your best in some blind way, but are really thinking about things – that ultimately, you're there for a reason, and you hope you will get the result you want and that is the way things have worked.