

2012 Women Who Mean Business: Grace Speights

Women WHO MEAN BUSINESS

Grace Speights

Managing partner, D.C. office,
Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP

Born into a poor neighborhood in Philadelphia during the baby boom, very little has come easily to Grace Speights. But today she rates as both a pioneer — the first African-American woman to become a partner at her law firm — and a leader, as managing partner of Morgan Lewis' District office. Speights, 55, focuses her practice on defending clients in employment discrimination claims and counseling businesses on diversity programs. She's also played a key role in the profession, helping recommend judges for D.C. courts and leading major pro bono efforts.

What's something not many people know about you? I don't think most people know, or they'd be shocked in terms of my whole background, how I grew up. I attended an Attorneys of Color conference, and for some reason, I got asked to be the keynote last year, and everybody was there — our firm management, senior partners. We held the conference seven or eight blocks from where I grew up. The thought of growing up in that neighborhood and then many, many, many years later, to be a partner at a major firm, that's what I talked about. And people were pretty amazed, wondering how I did going through that, dodging bullets, walking over drug addicts, being raised by a single mom — a good single mom, not the stereotypical stuff you hear about in poor neighborhoods. It was a story



folks could not believe.

Name a fictional character you identify with.
Captain Kathryn Janeway from "Star Trek: Voyager"

What's your strongest character trait? I'm organized. Very organized. I keep lists of lists. It's bad. Both in the office and at home.

How do you see yourself as a leader? It's still an area of growth for me, but spending more time with the people that I lead. My schedule is so hectic that I'm an email, text message kind of person, and I think that's a bad way to manage. You've got to have some physical, interpersonal interaction.

Family: Daughter Ashley, 26; son Nathaniel "Hank"

Education: Bachelor's degree, University of Pennsylvania; law degree, George Washington University Law Center

Residence: D.C.