



International Women's Day: Kate Hodson on how to get more women to the top in law

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I am honoured to be featured in Ogier's campaign marking International Women's Day 2019. A great opportunity to pay tribute to a global effort to highlight women's achievements and the various movements advocating for gender equality and female empowerment.

I became a partner at Ogier in 2015. At the time I was the first female partner in Ogier's Hong Kong office and the youngest partner in the firm. It was a great achievement and I was excited to take on the new challenge – but it was also daunting. Ogier invests in a coaching scheme which I found very beneficial in this phase. My professional coach assisted me to dispel a few unhelpful "mental frames", promoting a more effective and positive mind-set to approach the various new challenges that came with the role.

I believe that the value of mentors and coaches cannot be overestimated when it comes to furthering our careers. We can be our own worst enemy if we're not recognising our value and advocating for our personal progression. Coaches/mentors can provide an independent sounding board to help guide one through this process, which is why I applied to become a mentor on the mentoring programme established by Women in Law (WilHK). WilHK is a community started by a group of passionate female legal professionals. One of the key topics in this forum is how we reduce the rate of attrition of female lawyers from private practice. We know that despite the numbers of female solicitors in the industry (for example, the number of women solicitors practicing in England and Wales outnumbered the number of male solicitors last year), this isn't reflected at the senior levels of the profession.

To tackle this disparity, we need for it to be sufficiently attractive for women to stay in private practice and it goes without saying that there should not be a gender pay gap. What is ethically right is also good for business – because diversity is shown to be good for business. It's important for attracting and retaining talent not least because a level playing field allows the best person for the job to reach her (or his) full potential. Diversity also allows for a broader range of management styles, techniques and outlooks to be experienced throughout the business.

Aside from equal pay, what else helps to achieve this? Flexible working hours and workplace innovation is increasingly becoming the norm for modern companies. Arguably this modern approach is critical to create the right environment for women to have an equal opportunity to succeed as compared to their male counterparts. Juggling family life and professional demands is possible but law firms/companies need to be sufficiently agile to adapt to different working arrangements. A culture which promotes "face time" is not beneficial to employees, or indeed clients, as it simply rewards inefficiency. In addition, a regimented approach to the way staff work leaves little room for new ideas to develop.

I'm proud of the fact that Ogier has been working hard to not only provide the necessary infrastructure to allow for flexible working but has gone a step further, namely to strive to embed this in our culture. Just take a look at the technology we have invested in and the firm's embrace of remote working. There's also that constant questioning "how can we be doing things differently".

This approach provides an environment for lawyers to grow and thrive should they make the most of the opportunity to do so. Legal work aside, I have been very grateful for the long leash I've been given when it comes to my "eco" endeavours. I was told that the door was open to me if I was keen to take this forward and so with that encouragement I launched Ogier's first green team in the Hong Kong office. Since then I have started working with my fellow Green Team members to reduce our office's environmental footprint. It's extremely rewarding to work for a firm with this "can do" kind of attitude.

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