

## **Executive Summary of the Law Society of Upper Canada’s Justicia Project Materials on Developing Women’s Leadership in the Legal Profession**

The Law Society of Upper Canada’s Justicia Project has produced a thorough and excellent guide and resource for developing women’s leadership in the legal profession<sup>1</sup>. BC’s Justicia Project endorses that guide and encourages law firms and lawyers to review and follow it. The following serves to introduce and summarize the Ontario guide and its conclusions, and adds the comments and insights of women leaders from BC.<sup>2</sup>

### **Why should you read this Guide?**

Even if you think you have no interest in leadership, you should read this Guide. In a very real and pragmatic way, practicing law involves exercising leadership every day. The best practices in this Guide will be directly relevant to how you represent both your clients and yourself in the way you work.

*“You’re an advocate, so be an advocate for yourself. No one knows you and what you want, what you need and what you can bring to the table, like you.”*

### **What is leadership?**

There are many aspects to leadership. It is not just having a position or title – it is the ability to influence, inspire and motivate people so that all are working to the same goals.

*“The job of a leader is to develop and empower those she is supposed to lead.”*

Many positions within a law firm carry leadership responsibilities. Some of these have more influence, such as membership on a compensation committee, or being a practice group leader or managing partner. There are other positions within firms that involve less leadership responsibility but are still important, and may be stepping-stones to other more influential positions. Leadership can also come from within, such as being a good rainmaker, or having acknowledged expertise in an area. Likewise, having qualities that make a lawyer a good mentor, or being known as someone from whom one can obtain thoughtful advice, can result in someone becoming a leader. There are also leadership positions within the legal and broader communities such as volunteering with a CBA committee, teaching a CLE course, being a benchler, or sitting on the board of a community charity.

*“There is no cookie-cutter way of maximizing your contributions to the business.”*

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.lsuc.on.ca/uploadedFiles/Equity\\_and\\_Diversity/Justicia/Leadership\\_Skills\\_2013\(1\).pdf](http://www.lsuc.on.ca/uploadedFiles/Equity_and_Diversity/Justicia/Leadership_Skills_2013(1).pdf)

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this summary only, we have taken excerpts from the responses provided by the women leaders whom we interviewed and made minor edits to them. Their full responses can be found in Appendix A – Leadership Questions and Answers.

## **What are the characteristics of successful leaders?**

Successful leaders are good lawyers. They have excellent people skills, and are strategic, confident and resilient. But there is no one formula or combination of traits that will make a person a successful leader. Leaders are flexible and can adapt to different situations.

*“Learning to lead is always a work in progress and a lifelong one.”*

## **How do women and firms benefit from women leaders?**

Women have unique leadership styles that are effective. Firms with women in leadership roles are more likely to do better financially.

*“Diversity of thought, perspective, approach, and style are critical to organizational success.”*

Women leaders are role models for others, particularly junior women lawyers. Women who see other women in leadership positions will know that this is possible for them and will be encouraged to aspire to such positions. Having women in leadership positions promotes a culture of equality between men and women and the sense that advancement is based on merit rather than gender.

Women make up more than 50% of graduating law school classes. Having women in visible leadership positions attracts the best graduates and ensures the largest pool of talented candidates. A greater pool of women leaders leads to greater opportunity for succession planning.

*“Leadership positions give women the ability to help shape the organizations that in turn shape our society. It empowers the women in those positions, but it also inspires others.”*

Women, along with all people from diverse cultures and backgrounds, bring different perspectives and values to leadership, allowing the diverse values of society and clients to be better represented and met. Many purchasers of legal services are now considering and even requiring diversity information when hiring counsel.

*“We have a different and equally valuable perspective and set of experiences, without which we will never be able to create a profession where both men and women are able to thrive.”*

Women leaders have the power and access to the resources that influence outcomes, in their own careers, in their firms and in the profession. They can influence policies to promote women and women’s perspectives on issues. They can rebut negative stereotyping of women. Leaders with greater control and choices have more fulfilling careers.

*“Our contribution as women leaders offers something unique and new that needs to be heard; and our collective, caring voice carries a force that makes a difference in this world for the better.”*

## **What are unique challenges for women in leadership?**

There are comparatively few women in leadership positions and senior women in private practice. As a result, a small number of women are often asked to be on committees or be speakers. A larger pool of women leaders would lessen the burden and give others the opportunity to share their experiences, and be role models for other women.

Women continue to bear the majority of family responsibilities, and the demands of family and motherhood compete with the demands of a legal career.

Women continue to face unconscious and sometimes systemic bias in the workplace. For example, women who need time to care for family may be thought to be less committed to their careers, with the result that they are not given the same opportunities as their male colleagues. Further, many leadership qualities are often thought of as masculine traits. When women demonstrate the same qualities, they are sometimes criticized for them.

Some women may undervalue their abilities to be leaders. They may not consider their own potential unless they see other women in leadership positions or someone encourages them in that direction.

*“Women are often socialized not to seek out leadership positions unless they believe that they are at least 99% qualified for the position.”*

Women who are under pressure to contribute to firms by doing non-billable activities may not be as well-compensated as those who participate more in rainmaking and billings.

Women may feel that they are, and may be, appointed to committees or put in positions of leadership as the “token” women. This may cause women to decline positions if they feel they will be under increased scrutiny either as someone who lacks the credentials, or who will unfairly favour other women.

*“If someone in the firm expresses confidence in your leadership skills – seize that. I still see a tendency to pull back, and women have to stop that self-regulation.”*

Some law firms may not be accepting of diverse leadership styles, including the leadership styles of women, and may only accept leaders that confirm to a masculine model of leadership. Women may not be assigned mentors who have enough influence themselves to promote or sponsor the advancement of women.

## **What can be done?**

1. Develop a sponsorship program. This is distinct from the formal and informal mentoring in which most firms engage. A sponsor actively supports and promotes another person. Assign a sponsor with influence to women who have the potential to be leaders.

*“They provided me with opportunities that allowed me to progress and demonstrate my ability both to myself and others.”*

2. Encourage junior lawyers to develop a leadership plan early in their careers to develop and demonstrate their leadership potential, and to seek out a sponsor.

*“Define the future: Be proactive. At every level of the organization plan, act and behave so that you are defining the future as much as possible.”*

*“Get out there early! You don’t have to perfect every stage of your lawyering skills before you carve your own niche.”*

3. Continue to develop leadership skills and experience in mid- and senior-level lawyers. Women lawyers should consider which committees, roles or additional training would allow them to continue to develop and demonstrate their skills and leadership style and advance their leadership opportunities.

*“It’s important to invest in people and give them as much responsibility as they can reasonably handle.”*

4. Ensure there are senior women in leadership positions to be role models for more junior lawyers, and value those positions both financially and culturally.

*“My most important mentors included women leaders who inspired me, informed me, showed me a better way to get things done, listened to my woes and doubts, made me laugh, and kept me striving”.*

5. Develop a culture that supports promoting women to leadership positions. Recognize and accept that leadership styles differ and a variety of leadership styles may be needed or effective in different situations. Make the selection of leaders as transparent as possible and ensure that the process for selecting candidates for leadership positions is fair and does not have any unconscious bias. Ensure that the selection pool is inclusive and reflects the diverse nature of society, the firm and its clients. Fairly value and compensate non-billable leadership work of women.

*“I had partners who opened doors and sometimes pushed me when I was too comfortable.”*

6. Develop a culture that supports women to take on leadership positions outside the firm, including within the profession and in other communities. Actively promote, support and nominate women for awards and positions in professional associations.
7. Read this and the Law Society of Upper Canada guide. Take steps, through a committee or a responsible person, to implement these goals. Set metrics and measure your success.

## APPENDIX A: LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### 1. How do you describe your leadership style and how did you develop it?

“I definitely have a collaborative style of leadership. I’m told that I am good at ensuring that diverse ideas are heard while still ensuring that we reach a conclusion or achieve a good result.”

- Nicole Byres, Q.C., Miller Thomson LLP

“I believe my style has evolved to be analytical, inclusive and decisive.... A leader is needed to set the course and ensure everyone is headed in the same direction.... People love the discussion, but also like the energy of a resolution and the focus of a direction.”

- Anne Giardini, Q.C., Chancellor of SFU

“I believe that the job of a leader is to develop and empower those she is supposed to lead. She does so by being supportive, encouraging, collaborative and above all, fair minded.”

- Anna Fung, Q.C., Former President of the Law Society of British Columbia

“I’m inclusive, in large measure because the truly innovative ideas come from others. I’m also really task driven, finding joy in completion, so I spend a lot of time engaging others in strategic goals to ensure we all have actionable, next steps, all going in the same direction. But most importantly, there is this. It is really important for me to be the person who absorbs the stress of others, rather than creates further stress.”

- Lisa Vogt, Q.C., McCarthy Tetrault LLP

“It is a mixture of styles - both participatory and directive, and it developed over time. However, for me it starts with a clearly articulated vision and the development of roles within the group that play to people's strengths and interests and needs.”

- Carmen Theriault, Q.C., Bull, Housser & Tupper LLP

“I like to think that I lead by example, and frankly, I think I developed my ‘style’ out of some frustration with the pace of some things. If you want to get something done, as a busy person, so I try to lead by example and show what can be done.”

- Jan Lindsay, Q.C., Lindsay LLP, Former President of the Law Society of BC

“As a young lawyer, I learned the importance of being a professional first and a business person a close second. So to me, leadership of a group of high-achieving professionals means a very flat organizational structure and a team first environment. I am constantly saying “all of us are smarter than one of us.”

- Lori Mathison, Managing Partner, Dentons Canada, LLP

## 2. **Why is it important for women to seek leadership positions?**

“I see it as a responsibility to yourself, the profession and the broader community. Leadership builds confidence in your abilities, provides broadened engagement with others and is profile-building. Leadership in organizations outside of your practice can add a satisfying other dimension to your professional life. As a mother of two daughters, I wanted to be a positive role model.”

- Rita Andreone, Q.C., Lawson Lundell LLP, Law Society of BC Life Bencher

“Women bring different views to the table. Views that are critical to the success of a business. We’re going through a period of profound change in the delivery of legal services, and our clients have different expectations and value determinants: why wouldn’t you have a diverse leadership team to provide the input to adapting to, and succeeding, in that change. It’s kind of a no-brainer. It won’t happen by chance though. If someone in the firm expresses confidence in your leadership skills – seize that. I still see a tendency to pull back, and women have to stop that self-regulation.”

- Valerie Mann, Managing Partner, Lawson Lundell LLP

“Because we matter. Because our contribution as women leaders offers something unique and new that needs to be heard; and, because our collective, caring voice carries a force that makes a difference in this world for the better.”

- Maria Morellato, Q.C., Mandell Pinder LLP, Law Society of BC Bencher

“We are living in an increasingly diverse and demanding world. Diversity of thought, perspective, approach, and style are critical to organizational success these days. If a woman is energized by the prospect of leading then there is every opportunity these days for her to pursue that goal.”

- Sue Paish, Q.C., CEO of Lifelabs Inc.

“It is a way to effect social change, and not just in the context of gender equality. We need a diversity of views and styles at the table. Leadership positions give women the ability to help shape the organizations that in turn shape our society. It empowers the women in those positions, but it also inspires others.”

- Carmen Theriault, Q.C., Bull, Housser & Tupper LLP

“Women see the world differently than men do – and that is good and needs to be reflected in our leaders. We need both.”

- Anne Stewart, Q.C., Blake, Cassels & Graydon, LLP

3. **Did you have a sponsor? Or mentors? If so, how important were they in your career development?**

“I did have a sponsor, and it made all the difference in the world. I don’t know that I realized it at the time, but I was incredibly fortunate to work with a senior corporate partner at the firm from a very early stage in my career. Not only was I given the opportunity to cut my teeth on great work that was challenging, David encouraged me to stretch. He had the confidence in me to let me run with corporate transactions and I guess knew that I was the kind of person that would sweat something through to the right result. But what I suspect he also did, was speak up for me. His endorsement was not only incredibly humbling, but it was likely critical to my advancement.”

- Valerie Mann, Managing Partner, Lawson Lundell LLP

“My most important mentors were, first, my husband, who has good judgment and a skill set - accounting and finance - that I don't have, and, second, women leaders ...who inspire me, inform me, show me a better way to get things done, listen to my woes and doubts, make me laugh, and keep me striving. I could not have achieved half of what I have done without them. It is a rare woman who makes it on her own.”

- Anne Giardini, Q.C., Chancellor of SFU

“Yes, I was very fortunate to have had several excellent male sponsors/mentors in the course of my career. They took the time to teach and encourage me to be the best lawyer that I was capable of being. They gave me opportunities to work on interesting and challenging files. They entrusted their clients to me. They sang my praises regularly. They taught me the need and importance of giving back to the community and contributing to the well-being of our society. They inspired me with their willingness to pass on their learnings to a generation of younger lawyers without self-interest or concern that they would be rendered redundant in the process.”

- Anna Fung, Q.C., '86, Former President of BCLS

“I have had, and continue to have, many mentors, including family and colleagues, both young and old. Most would be surprised to know they were mentors. My career has been rich because of the experience and wisdom of others. Live like a sponge, and absorb the good. I also had partners who opened doors and sometimes pushed me when I was too comfortable; that’s what a sponsor does.”

- Lisa Vogt, Q.C., McCarthy Tetrault LLP

4. **Looking back, what advice would you give to your 30 year old self in regards to finding your voice as a leader?**

“Get out there early! Honestly, I felt like I had a lost decade where I could have made much more headway. You don’t have to perfect every stage of your lawyering skills before you carve your own niche.”

- Valerie Mann, Managing Partner, Lawson Lundell LLP

“Stop spending so much time second guessing myself or doubting my opinions, actions, decisions etc. I’m much more comfortable now with the notion that my decisions/actions etc. are probably correct, and sometimes brilliant and insightful. Also, I would like to tell my younger self that sometimes, doing an 'okay' job (rather than a 'perfect' job) is all that is needed.”

- Nicole Byres, Q.C., Miller Thomson LLP

“Step up more, challenge myself to do more and don’t be afraid of failing.”

- Jan Lindsay, Q.C., Lindsay LLP, Former President of the Law Society of BC

“Listen. Learn. Read. Fill out areas of weakness. Pay attention. Don't be quelled or discouraged. Try your voice out, and measure its effectiveness. Ask for feedback. Strive not for humility but for confidence with lightness of self.”

- Anne Giardini, Q.C., Chancellor of SFU

“Be confident in your own ability. The ‘highs’ are likely not quite as high as you make them out to be and the lows are not as low as you think: the sky does not actually fall. ... Define your personal happiness and then pursue it.”

- Sue Paish, Q.C., CEO of Lifelabs Inc.

“You, and what you have to say, really matter. Take heart and speak up: what you offer is very worthy and will make a difference. Believe in yourself, but don’t forge ahead alone. Seek guidance and support from those you trust and admire; ask graciously for what you need. Dare to chart your course based on what you most value and aspire to. Then, find like-minded colleagues to travel with you. Along the way, support and care for each other, keep “paying it forward” and have fun!”

- Maria Morellato, Q.C., Mandell Pinder LLP, Law Society of BC Benchers

“Don’t wait to be asked to take on a role or to express your opinion. Your interest in contributing and your views will always be valued. At the same time, be strategic about how to deploy your most valuable resource – your time.”

- Lori Mathison, Managing Partner, Dentons Canada, LLP



“You’re an advocate, so be an advocate for yourself, because no one knows you and what you want, what you need and what you can bring to the table, like you. ... Fight back any self-doubt and stretch beyond your comfort zone.”

- Rita Andreone, Q.C., Lawson Lundell LLP, Law Society of BC Life Bencher

“First, the price of leadership is hard work, especially in the early years. Be prepared for that and remember that while having balance in your life is important, it doesn't necessarily mean that you can have all of the things you want at the same time.

Second, weak leaders surround themselves with followers. Strong leaders surround themselves with those who have the potential to be even stronger leaders.

Third, don't be afraid - to speak up, to shine, to accept credit for your achievements.”

- Carmen Theriault, Q.C., Bull, Housser & Tupper LLP

“Don't be afraid to ask questions and offer suggestions – what is the worst that can happen? When I was a junior lawyer, I would often say: “this may be a dumb suggestion but have you thought about X or would Y work? The response was either: “yes we did” and they would then explain to me why X or Y didn't work and I learned something. Or they said “oh, no we didn't. Thanks for the idea”. In either case, I won – I either learned something or got recognition for a good idea – and the client knew I was thinking about the issue creatively and proactively.”

- Anne Stewart, Q.C., Blake, Cassels & Graydon, LLP

## **APPENDIX B: A SHORT LIST OF HIGHLY RECOMMENDED RESOURCES**

Lean In – Women, Work and the Will to Lead, by Sheryl Sandberg

Women on Top – The Woman’s Guide to Leadership and Power in Law Firms, by Ida Abbott

Learning to Lead: What Really Works for Women in Law, by Gindi Vincent and Mary Cranston

“The Confidence Gap”, Katty Kay and Claire Shipman, The Atlantic, April 14, 2014

TedTalk - Sheryl Sandberg: The 3 Mistakes of Working Women

TedTalk - Amy Cuddy: Your body language shapes who you are/Power Poses