

## The Rules (for Women): Steps May Be Unspoken But They Are Necessary, Successful Partners Say

Posted Jan 1, 2012 1:50 AM CST

By Susan A. Berson



Photo of Jane Pigott and E. Lynn Grayson  
by Jim Newberry

“For career advancement, there are unwritten rules women must follow,” says Jane Pigott, the first woman to secure the keys to Winston & Strawn’s executive and compensation committees.

Now the managing director of R3Group in Chicago, which consults with professional service organizations, Pigott says, “A strategic approach to work assignments and seeking out mentors to help you have access to firm leadership are the keys to advancing.”

According to Pigott, Jenner & Block partner E. Lynn Grayson of Chicago and presentations coach Deb Sofield of Greenville, S.C., here’s how to move up:

- 1. Determine the informal leadership network.** “The person who has the billings has the voice at the compensation table,” Pigott says. “The relationship partners with the three top clients—those are the people whose opinions matter from a political viewpoint.” Others may lead by quiet example without titles or JDs, so observe who has the pull. “Don’t judge based on seniority or title. Sometimes those with the best judgment and cultural knowledge aren’t lawyers.” And gather different perspectives. “Everyone has a slightly different perspective, and you have to determine whose perspective you trust.”
- 2. Build relationships, and contemplate a male mentor.** “Bias, explicit and implicit, exists. If there’s a mentor program offering access to male leaders, having positive visibility with a male leader is a way around people with biases.”
- 3. Prepare for evaluation.** Meet with someone who knows what the firm expects, values and rewards. “Associates, turn to the professional development partner,” Pigott says. “Start with, ‘I’ve talked to the partners I’m working with, and here’s my list to try to accomplish skillwise for the next 12 months. Is this the right list? Do you have other suggestions?’ Develop a game plan. Sell ownership interests in implementing it.”
- 4. Billable hours remain a measurement.** “People make presumptions that the busiest are the most competent,” says Pigott. When business is slow, “the quantity of work impacts whether you’re able to develop the skill set that is commensurate with your seniority level. When there’s enough work to go around, the quality of assignments and working with the right people for skill development are important.”
- 5. For partners, Pigott says, “elevating to management requires skill-building experience, delegating to—and supervising—others.”** Jenner & Block’s Grayson agrees. “Business generation is key, but internal and external opportunities where others have entrusted you with leadership roles showcase your leadership skills.”

**6. Gain positive visibility.** “It’s important that the view of you, and your work, be positive. Perceptions are created by various factors,” Pigott says. “Are your hours on target? Below the firm’s goals? Each category creates a perception about you.”

Appearance affects perceptions, so from clothing to demeanor and the language used, “don’t undercut your authority,” says Sofield, an executive speech and corporate presentations coach. “Always present an authoritative, professional image.” Sofield adds, “That handshake is a signal of your confidence and self-esteem. The ‘crusher’ builds a feeling of authority and power; a ‘limp fish’ handshake conveys weakness. Practice it.”

**7. Self-promote.** “Many women tend to think, ‘If I do a good job, people will recognize me and I will gain respect’, ” explains Grayson. “To advance, you have to take the next step. ... If you’re not able to ‘toot your own horn’, so to speak, and tell the right connections about what you’re doing, or what you are capable of doing, then you need to have built relationships with leaders to do it for you.”