

Q: Why do you think it is important to celebrate International Women's Day/Month?

A: We are making progress towards greater equality, but it is disappointing to observe just how extraordinarily slow that progress is. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report for 2021 confirmed that it will take another 136 years to achieve gender parity and discrimination continues to be a very real challenge faced by women. When reading the Report I was surprised to learn that, even today, there are still 72 countries where women are barred from opening bank accounts or obtaining credit. By celebrating International Women's Day we can turn the spotlight on the work that still needs to be done to empower women and girls, and highlight the achievements of women who continue to work so hard to advance women's rights.

Q: What was your journey to get to where you are now?

A: My journey started with a happy childhood in rural New Zealand, involved studying for my law degree and getting my first role as a solicitor in Auckland, led to Australia where I worked for four years in a large Sydney law firm, and then took me offshore to practice law in the Cayman Islands (with a stint living in San Francisco thrown in too!). It has been punctuated by the birth of two children, a stint as a stay-at-home mum, loads of international travel with colleagues, fascinating clients from all corners of the world, and continues to throw up interesting and varied challenges now that I am a partner at Carey Olsen. It has been far from uneventful!

Q: What challenges have you faced as a woman in the industry, and how have you overcome them?

A: While the numbers of women choosing law as a career are now significant, that was not always the case early on in my career and I have often found it daunting to be in the minority in a room of colleagues, peers, or industry specialists. Speaking up, and being heard, in those circumstances can be difficult but I have been lucky enough to be able to seek out and work alongside leaders (both men and women) in various firms who have been eager to support women in their organisation. As a more senior lawyer, I now always try to be part of the change myself - joining committees focused on mentoring juniors, supporting diversity and anti-discrimination initiatives, and working to make our workplace one in which women from varying backgrounds and with varying commitments outside of work can thrive.



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Bernadette is the head of our Cayman Islands Trust and Private Wealth team and has a broad private client practice advising on wealth structuring and estate planning matters, including the administration, restructuring, and termination of trusts, as well as probate and testamentary issues. She also has significant experience in trust litigation, regularly appearing before the Grand Court of the Cayman Islands on multi-party non-contentious applications and contentious trust disputes, as well as in respect of estate litigation and other cross-border private client disputes.



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Q: What advice would you give to other women in the industry building their careers?

A: Establishing a successful career in the law takes time and a lot of energy, and in the early days it is mostly all expended on clients and the demands of colleagues and peers. Amongst all of this it is important to allocate some time to get to know yourself – your likes and dislikes, your strengths and weaknesses – so that you can ultimately create the career that you want for yourself, rather than one that others might want for you or their business model. And don't be afraid to take longer breaks along the way to spend time with friends and family, to travel or pursue an interest outside of the office. Often what feels like a lifetime away from the desk or others might consider a career-limiting move can in fact be an enriching experience that passes in the blink of an eye and proves not to be detrimental to your career at all.

Q: What women have supported or inspired you throughout your career and why?

A: I was lucky enough to be assigned, as a clerk fresh out of law school, to a smart, savvy, and supremely stylish partner by the name of Emma Butcher at Buddle Findlay in New Zealand. She supported me as I learnt the ropes as a junior lawyer and I was always inspired by her ability to seamlessly combine her superior legal knowledge with impressive emotional intelligence in her dealings with clients and colleagues. Even now, 20 years later, I try and follow her approach when mentoring others. More recently, I have also warmly welcomed into the Carey Olsen partnership by the senior women in our firm who have been nothing but supportive and collaborative since I joined Carey Olsen in 2018.

Q: It's 2022, how can we move forward in the industry to raise awareness against bias and take further action for equality?

A: Raising awareness about bias and inequality in the industry requires industry-wide support. It also requires a commitment to confronting uncomfortable truths and a willingness to take actual action to introduce real change, rather than paying lip service to ideas and concepts. With buy-in from everyone in the workplace and the community at large, we can make greater progress towards stamping out discrimination and bias and offer a more welcoming and encouraging space for young women just starting out in their careers. Perhaps we can even shave a few years off that gender parity gap in the process.