

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

A: The contribution of women in so many areas of life has historically been overlooked/undervalued and stifled let alone not celebrated, and women in many countries even now remain the underdog (or worse). It is important to encourage younger women coming through their professional and personal development, by showing them that women are valued, valuable and without limits in what they can achieve. It is also important to show leadership in that to countries where women are discriminated against and prevented from giving their full contribution to their society and the world. It's the world's loss.

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

A: I was fortunate in being brought up in a happy home which valued learning with supportive (& fun) parents. My father was a solicitor and I was very proud of him. He instilled in me pride in that profession, the importance of its integrity and hard work (and play). There was no question that less was expected of me than my brothers. He had come from an academic family (albeit classics and economics). It made me want to be a solicitor from an early age, and via Kings College London, Chester College of Law and articles at Moon Beever, I achieved that in 1986. I began doing litigation and then insolvency and then began working for the then Customs and Excise in 1988 and developed a love of anti-fraud work as well as contentious insolvency and broader commercial litigation. I have been given legs up and tips along the way by lovely colleagues such as Steve Hill who was a Partner at PwC and Michael Prior who is sadly no longer with us, to develop my wider interest in insolvency and fraud through R3, InsolEurope and International as well as the Fraud Advisory Panel and FIRE and other organisations. The UK insolvency regime is a well-crafted and excellent creation. In July 2021 after my 21 years as managing partner of Moon Beever we merged our legal practice with Wedlake Bell LLP where I now head up the Insolvency & Restructuring Team, and sit on the Board. Wedlake Bell has the right feel and people centric culture (& many senior women!).

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

A: There have always been "boys clubs" -we just need to have some "girls clubs" too. Golf isn't something women are encouraged into for example but then as a horse rider I still consider it a good walk (or rather gallop) ruined. I bought the copyright to a copy of that Punch cartoon of a board room with the male Chair saying "That's an excellent suggestion, Miss Triggs. Perhaps one of the men here would like to make it." and it still makes me laugh and sigh in equal measure. Women often need more confidence in themselves and not to be measured by men's measures. I think it is trite nowadays but true that a good business is best as a diverse business valuing the contributions of a wide range of people to make a success, and law is a people business where it is more true than ever.



FRANCES COULSON

Partner, Head Of Insolvency & Restructuring
Wedlake Bell

Frances gained her LLB (Hons) at Kings' College, London University in 1983. She then attended Chester College of Law. She joined Moon Beever in 1984 (where she trained) qualifying in 1986, and became a partner in 1988, becoming Managing Partner in 2000 and Senior Partner in 2014. She joined Wedlake Bell from Moon Beever in July 2021 when the firms merged and is a member of the Board.

**INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S
DAY**

ThoughtLadies that inspire



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

A: Don't try to be a male clone. Be yourself. Be confident in your abilities (without running before you can walk) and don't allow yourself to be stereotyped. Being "that woman" isn't always a bad thing. At least they remember you. Not everyone will like you or respect you but like and respect yourself. And most of all, enjoy the job.

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

A: I was the old bird in a partnership of men in Moon Beever, so a lot of colleagues, competitors and clients such as Liz Bingham formerly of EY, Louise Brittain now of Azets, Patricia Godfrey formerly of Nabarro, as well as my fantastic school and university friends and most of all my 3 daughters, now grown women themselves who support and inspire me every day. I wanted them to know they were capable of anything and so they have proved! I should also say that my husband has supported and inspired me by easily and without fuss taking on the stay at home parent role (though I think my daughters saw more race meetings than their schools approved of). I am now fortunate to work in Wedlake Bell with very impressive women such as Kim Lalli our senior partner and Camilla Wallace Head of Private Client and many others. They keep the inspiration going.

Q: How can we move forward in the industry to raise awareness against bias and take further action for equality?

A: Call it out. Laugh at it. It is unacceptable. Don't just accept all male panels at conferences, all male boards. Have less male targeted marketing or at least balance it with more mixed marketing events. It is proven that people are more likely to hire in their own image and as the hirers have for a long time been men it can be slow progress to get equality at all levels for women who aren't even a minority! Support female promotions and equality of child care. Why wouldn't you want to employ someone who can do it all? (though they shouldn't have to). If a woman manager is caring and empathetic that's a strength not a weakness, see it as such, maybe teach the men! Women, don't stereotype yourselves. If you are senior in a meeting don't be the one to pour the tea. Or if you do, joke about it to make it clear you have the choice.

