

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

A: International Women's Day is a celebration of the achievements of women in history and a global call to action and support of gender equality. If we look back in time, we can learn from history and women's achievements that have helped us advance the goal of gender equality over the years. While we have made significant strides, these efforts are as important today as they were in the 1900s when they began. There are still barriers that oppress women. There are less women in leadership positions in business and pay equality remains a struggle. Because we have accomplished much, we have much to celebrate but we have much more to do.

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

A: I started the practice of law approximately 25 years ago as a single woman in a boutique insolvency practice. I am now a wife and a mother of adult children and have developed as a leader in the practice of law, never believing that I had to give up one for the other.

Since the start of my practice, I have led large litigation teams, opened an office in my city for a firm that grew from 4 attorneys to nearly 50 attorneys and now practice in a boutique firm once again where I am enjoying developing my practice in the niche area of cross-

border insolvency and international asset recovery. Along the way, I have accepted leadership roles in various professional organizations including the International Women's Insolvency and Restructuring Confederation (IWIRC), the Florida Bar's Business Law Section and the Bankruptcy Bar of the Southern District of Florida with an aim at giving back to a profession that I love and hoping to make a difference along the way by helping create opportunities for other women and minorities in the profession. I have never felt as if I was breaking a glass ceiling but have instead viewed the sky as my limit. In addition, I have been fortunate to have had significant mentors and sponsors along the way who have supported me in many aspects of my professional development and helped me build the confidence necessary to succeed.

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

A: For many years, I would have answered this question by simply stating that I had never encountered challenges or discrimination in my career based on my gender/race. Oftentimes, incidents that may have been motivated by bias and discrimination in my mind were examples of oversight or ignorance of others. Being prepared, confident and comfortable in my knowledge of the subject matter and my speaking abilities, have helped me overcome situations in which I have encountered challenges motivated by discrimination.



LEYZA F. BLANCO

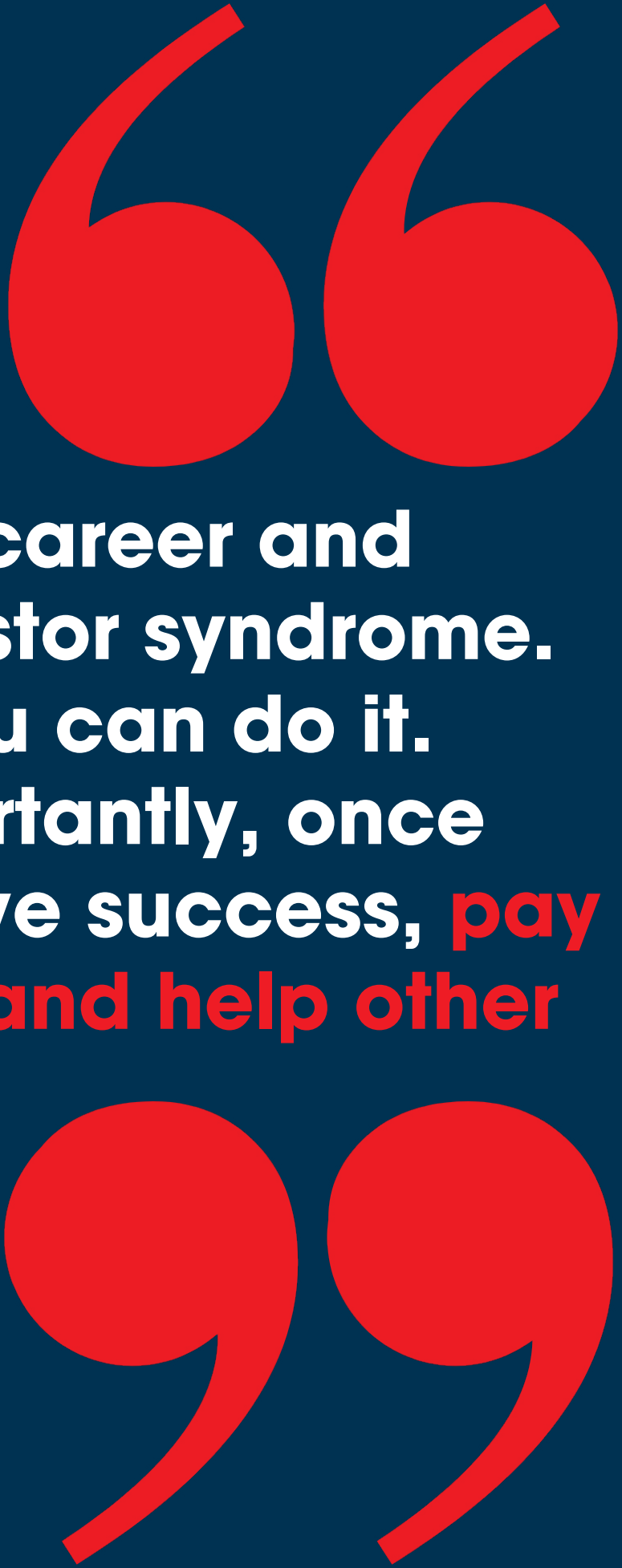
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Leyza F. Blanco, a shareholder at Sequor Law, focuses her practice on a wide range of litigation and insolvency matters, including debt restructuring and representation of creditors, with special emphasis on complex business bankruptcy and commercial litigation matters.



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Own your career and fight impostor syndrome. Believe you can do it. Most importantly, once you achieve success, pay it forward and help other women.



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

A: To women building their careers in law, my advice would be to find good sponsors/mentors. First, do your homework, develop as the best in your craft and be prepared and confident to voice your opinion. Join organizations that seek to help promote and support women, build a network and take on leadership roles. Manage your expectations and remain centered. Own your career and fight impostor syndrome. Believe you can do it. Most importantly, once you achieve success, pay it forward and help other women.

The formula for success is simple. Work hard and maintain quality and consistency in your work product. Be genuine and highlight your individuality. This is key to building strong relationships along the way. Relationship capital is the key to business development. Finally, stay involved and invest your time and talent in both your community and professional development.

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

A: My mom is my role model because at a young age she left Cuba, the country of her birth, and all that she knew in search for freedom and a better life in the United States. It is through her sacrifice that I was born in a land of opportunity and given the ability through education to strive for a better life than she had. I often wonder whether I would have the courage to do what she did if faced with the same obstacles. My mother taught me to work hard and always strive to be the best version of me. She taught me by example and modeling work ethic and tenacity. Although my Mom is not recognized by all as a famous woman in history, as a courageous woman determined to rise, she is and will always be my hero. I celebrate her accomplishments this and every Woman's History Month.

I was also very blessed to have key sponsors and mentors throughout my career. Marte Singerman hired me out of law school and modelled for me what it was like to be an effective, well-respected, female lawyer in our community. Judge Laurel Isicoff served as a mentor from afar, imparting advice that helped me navigate a healthy work life balance as I transitioned into motherhood in the practice of law. Patricia Redmond guided the way for me by providing opportunities to get involved in professional organizations and speaking engagements which were critical to raising my profile and building towards leadership positions. These and other women who are committed to pay it forward have had a significant impact on my career and have inspired me to do the same.



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

A: We must continue to support International Women's Day and organizations, such as IWIRC, with missions to support and mentor women.

We need to help women gain positions in power so we can see more women with a seat at the table in boardrooms and courtrooms. We must reject chauvinist attitudes, challenge stereotypes and pre-existing notions on gender and have zero tolerance for harassment. Most importantly, we need to pay it forward and help other women feel confident to voice their opinions and support each other.

