

# IF ONLY I KNEW THEN WHAT I KNOW NOW! CAREERS ADVICE TO MY YOUNGER SELF (FROM A 50- SOMETHING FEMALE LAWYER)

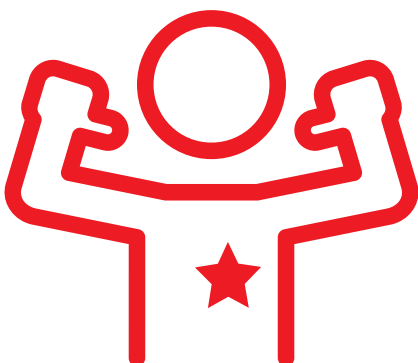


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As a 50-something partner in a law firm with more than 30 years' experience under my belt, I am proud of the career that I have managed to carve out for myself. Despite struggles and obstacles along the way, I'm a specialist in complex international disputes, advising clients on cases involving fraud, asset tracing, recovery, and contentious insolvency. Now armed with the wisdom and experience of those 30 plus years, what would I tell my younger self when she was first starting her career in the law? What advice would I give to make her ride less bumpy and equip her to better negotiate the obstacles that were put in her way?

## **Work With People You Like**

It's an old cliché but it's true - there is no "I" in team. You spend more time with your work colleagues than your own family, so it's important you like your firm's culture and your colleagues. It's much easier to collaborate with colleagues to deliver the best results for clients when you like them. Being in the right culture surrounded by the right team of people will enable you to grow and develop into the lawyer you want to be. There have been one or two instances in my career where I have taken a course offering a perceived business opportunity over people and culture. How wrong could I be? I have had, and am continuing to have, amazing professional experiences in my career because I have chosen the "right fit" for me; because I liked and enjoyed - and currently like and enjoy - working with my colleagues.



## **Have Confidence in Your Own Abilities**

Like many women I have suffered (and to a certain extent still suffer) from "imposter syndrome". For me, this all started when I first mentioned to my career's teacher at school that I wanted to become a lawyer. He politely told me that I would never make it as a lawyer firstly, because I am a woman and secondly, because of my working-class background. Thankfully I didn't listen to him! Work on not doubting yourself or measuring yourself against others. Finding a mentor can help. Whilst many firms now have excellent mentoring programmes, mentoring doesn't have to be part of a formal programme. I often tell younger counterparts that I never had a mentor, but that's not true. I just didn't recognise it as mentoring at the time.

There have been senior colleagues, both male and female, that have supported me in my career and without whom I wouldn't be here. Had I recognised them as mentors, I could have actively sought more guidance and support from them, which undoubtedly would have made the challenges I faced along the way much easier - particularly early on when the number of female lawyers in senior or partnership roles was low. Professional guidance and support from a mentor who you connect with and who knows your values and goals can be an invaluable resource for pursuing any career.

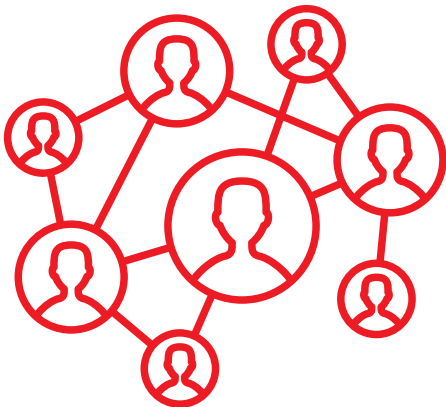


## **Don't Be Afraid of Change**

Embrace change, it can be the best thing you do for your career. In 2009 I took the plunge and moved offshore to the Cayman Islands where I worked for 12 years. The experience I gained and relationships I built during my time there has been invaluable for my practice. Whether you are unhappy in the specialism you initially chose and want to change, or an opportunity presents itself in a different part of the country or the world, don't be afraid - change can be the best thing for you. My only regret is not having the courage to make the change and move offshore much sooner than I did.

## Early Networking

I often tell people I went to the "opening of an envelope" when I was a junior lawyer. I never said no. However, my approach to networking was unstructured and "scatter-gun". I would encourage the 20-something me to get training and seek guidance on how to build the best network. Being systematic in following up with contacts and more strategic about who to focus on and which networks to become part of (especially women's networks) is key to successful work generation. My involvement in the International Women's Insolvency and Restructuring Confederation (IWIRC) as a director, both at local and board level, and networks like Women in FIRE are proving to be invaluable for opening doors and making connections that enable me to generate business.

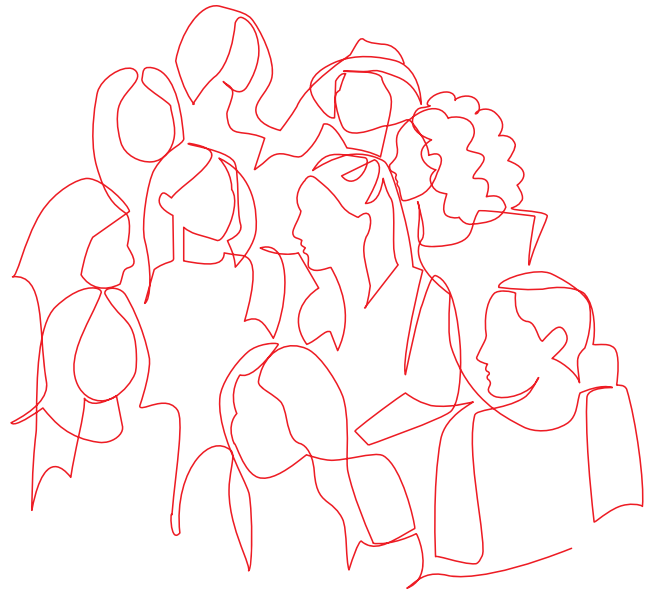


## Lift Up Other Women Along the Way

Women should advocate for other women. As we progress through the ranks it is important to keep looking over our shoulders to ensure that those following on behind us are supported. Because there are still so many more men in leadership roles than women in law firms, it can be tempting to focus on our own progression and own interests, keep ourselves to ourselves and compete with other women instead of working together. It is important we look for ways to celebrate each other and our successes and we help those around us to fulfil their potential. As a 50-something partner, one of the most satisfying, rewarding, and humbling things I do, is informally mentor, celebrate and advocate for other women both in my own firm and other firms. It gives me first-hand experience of how this inspires younger colleagues to do more and fulfil their own potential.

This is important both for our own organisations and for more women to become the leaders of the future.

So hopefully, armed with these 5 observations of my older, wiser self, 20-something me would have enjoyed her journey a little bit more, not felt so isolated at times, surrounded herself with more positive and supportive influences and been kinder to herself and celebrated her potential!



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