

# Women at Big Law No Regrets (On the Record)

---

The participants in this roundtable are partners at large law firms.

---

In 2007, 20 women partners from 10 leading New York law firms formed the Kate Stoneman Project (KSP), named in honor of the first woman admitted to the New York bar. KSP's mission is to promote the advancement of women in the profession and collective civic, bar, and pro bono activities. Women litigation partners from nine of the 10 KSP firms participated in a collective "deposition" for this article.

**Lori Lesser** (moderator; partner at Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP, New York City): *Good morning, everyone. The theme of today's conversation is regrets, which can mean having regrets or the absence of regrets. So let's dive in. If you could do it all over again, would you become a lawyer?*

**Mary Beth Forshaw** (partner at Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP, New York City): Absolutely. I love being a lawyer and practicing at a firm. Where else can you work collaboratively with smart people in a respectful environment? Where else can you go to court and get the highs and lows of winning and losing? The law is a terrific place to land.

**Amelia Starr** (partner at Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP, New York City): I agree. There is something about legal training and being a lawyer that makes you think you can solve problems, your client's problems, your problems, and your family's problems. And perhaps you have an overvalued sense of your ability to be a problem solver, but it makes you feel like you are a person who

makes a difference in the lives of your clients and in the lives of your pro bono clients and in the lives of your family.

**Maria T. Vullo** (partner at Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP, New York City): I echo what everyone else has said. Being a lawyer still means that we are part of a profession of people who care about what they do, who care about society at large, and who are interested in the intellectual pursuit of the law beyond the individual matters that we handle. And it's a profession that believes, as I do, that we all have a calling to the greater good and the ethics of our profession. That includes pro bono work and service to those in need.

**Lori Lesser**: *Have you had any regrets or second thoughts about becoming a litigator versus another practice specialty?*

**Amelia Starr**: Absolutely not.

**Kathleen O'Connor** (partner at Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP, New York City): I'm glad I'm a litigator. It certainly does depend on your personality. But I actually love the fight. And I love the problem-solving piece of it because a lot of our clients are in really difficult situations, and we get to help them when they're most in need. There are really hard things you have to talk to clients about in litigation—because, generally, we're on the defense side, and nobody's really particularly happy to be there—and we have to really help them understand the process, understand what's going to happen, and figure out how to get it done.



**Jennifer Kennedy Park** (partner at Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP, New York City): For me, in most of the litigation I do, government is on the other side. And, for me, that makes it even more interesting because the power of the federal government, in particular, is so vast and you're challenged in such different ways. For me, the more challenge there is, the better lawyer I am. The higher the bar, the higher I feel I have to jump, and I really like being challenged that way.

**Julia M. Jordan** (partner at Sullivan & Cromwell LLP, Washington, D.C.): Similar to Jennifer, I also do a fair amount of regulatory work and internal investigations, so I'm often dealing with very sensitive issues. The negative of this type of work is that you develop a great working relationship with a client but you hope—for the client's sake—that they will not need those services again.

**Maura Barry Grinalds** (partner at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP, New York City): I was born for the battle, as the eighth of nine children. Whether it's the David versus Goliath case, the Battle of the Titans, or multi-forum complex litigation, I wake up really excited about what I do. I love working with the [mergers and acquisitions] attorneys on deal litigation and have enormous respect for their craft, but I still wouldn't reconsider my decision. It gets my juices going. Whether you win or lose, you invest your whole self in it. I don't think I could do anything else.

**Amelia Starr:** Maura is right. The adrenaline rush is one of the best parts of being a litigator because we win. Sometimes we don't win, but mostly we win. And it is a tremendous adrenaline rush. There's just nothing like it. I don't think I could get motivated to come into the office every day if I didn't know I was not going to have a chance for that.

**Lori Lesser:** *How can law students avoid having regrets over their choice of practice specialty? Law schools teach by the case method, so there is perhaps a bias for everyone to think they are a litigator.*

**Maria T. Vullo:** I've had this discussion with a number of recruits, and I don't think it's personality—it's what you are most interested in doing. The way I see the distinction is, as a litigator, you're like an investigator, looking at the facts in the past and trying to figure out what happened; then you write about it and tell a story. As a corporate lawyer, you may be more forward-looking. There are two entities that want to merge or do some other transaction, and it is really more focused on the business side. Which one of those two genres you prefer, I don't think has to do with personality; it just has to do with one's interests.

**Maevae O'Connor:** (partner at Debevoise & Plimpton LLP, New York City): You have to like to tell a story. I think of litigation as fundamentally narrative, and I love that aspect of it. From day one, what's the story—what's the story we're telling?

It has to be consistent with the law, and it has to be consistent with the facts, but what is our story? If you love to write, if you love to tell a story, you like to talk, those are skills that lead you toward being a litigator. Both sides, both types of practices involve complexity and problem solving and those pieces of the puzzle. But I've always thought of it as a fundamentally narrative profession as well as a chess match and a battle, and I love that aspect of it.

**Jennifer Kennedy Park:** I always really thought that litigators tended to be the people who had the interest and the curiosity for digging through things. So, really wanting to ask all the questions, wanting to know the who, what, when, where, why, how, all of those things, and a little bit of snooping—interested in finding out all the pieces of the story and then putting it together. You have to have that natural curiosity—sitting in a deposition across from somebody, the natural instinct to follow through with the next question, and want to deal with what every little piece of the story is.

**Mary Beth Forshaw:** I agree with that. Trying to figure out how does this person tick or how does this place work—a lot of people just are not interested in that kind of analysis, minutiae, and detail. And if you have don't have that interest, you probably shouldn't be a litigator.

**Lori Lesser:** *Does anyone have regrets about coming to and staying at a big firm?*

**Mary Beth Forshaw:** I'll go on the record and say no regrets. I'm somebody who never saw myself ending up at a big law firm in New York. I think that was born of ignorance. I came to my firm, Simpson Thacher, and found that I could thrive because there was a long-standing culture of respect and a commitment to training. The nature of big firm practice is that you work in teams and you learn from your peers and you learn from senior people and they teach you how to be a lawyer. It's something of an apprenticeship. For me, it was a wonderful way to learn the practice of law. Big firms offer a tremendous opportunity. No regrets at all.

**Amelia Starr:** No, definitely not. If you want to do the most interesting things and get asked the questions that nobody knows the answers to, there's no better place to be than in a big firm. It's always interesting. It's always stimulating. You never go home and say I looked at the clock all day. It's more like, oh, what happened to my day? If you want to do something for 30 or 40 years, that's a long time. There are not many jobs that are interesting and engaging enough to do that way. Litigation in a firm like the firms that we all work for is one of the few things that's really interesting and exciting enough to keep us all passionate.

**Kathleen O'Connor:** This is actually my fourth job—my fourth grown-up job, if you will—which I'm always struck by because I never thought I would leave my first firm, which was

also a big law firm. I ultimately went in house and then came back out and have now been a partner in two firms. Sometimes I wish I had been at just one firm my entire career, because I miss having that sense of history and the infrastructure that goes along with that and the "Remember 20 years ago we worked on that case." I miss having that. But I like that, in a big law firm, you get to be a lawyer's lawyer. You get to grapple with the law in a way that an in-house lawyer just does not have the time to do. One of the reasons I came back to a firm is that I missed going to court. I missed being the person on the front lines. I missed the teamwork.

**Jennifer Kennedy Park:** I guess I don't have any regrets, but I presume all of us had moments in our careers where we had second thoughts or thought about the decision, and I've definitely had moments like that. But at each point where I've had second thoughts, I've always come to the decision that this was the place for me to stay—and largely because of all the things we've been talking about but also because of the great things

---

## A big firm is the best place to start your career and get terrific training.

---

that it's afforded me in my personal life. I've only been a partner three years, and I have three children. At each turn in my personal life, I've had a chance to ask of my firm: Here are the things that are going to make my life work for me; can you do those for me? The answer has always been yes. So, the flexibility I've been afforded at a big law firm is something I wouldn't find at another institution where I also might not be intellectually challenged in the way I've been challenged at a large firm.

**Maria T. Vullo:** Just to follow on what Jennifer said, one of the great things about being at a big firm, all the firms around this table, is that it is a long-term commitment by the firm to our careers. It's nice to be in a place where you are part of that kind of a long-term horizon. It's not an institution where people think that you become partner and then you go someplace else. I've never regretted the decision to go to a big firm, and it is the easy decision for law students to start off at a big firm. Many people decide to pursue other avenues after that, but a big firm is the best place to start your career and get terrific training. For me, like Maeve, I never thought I would stay at a big firm. I am from a family of Italian descent without college degrees, and I was paying off my loans. But, lo and behold, I discovered that it was a great place to be. I went to my firm because of its history



of public service and government commitment. I left to go into the government and came back after that. All of these firms are great places to be and to continue a career.

**Maura Barry Grinalds:** I agree with everything that all of you said, from the camaraderie to the flexibility and the depth of a big firm that can accommodate you and your personal life over the long term. I found my firm was just that same way. All of our firms have a vested interest in facilitating associate development and their ability to strike a balance. I've been here my entire career, and they've accommodated me through four children. I was able to do my practice and stay with the kinds of cutting-edge cases I like, and I also was able to pursue my commitment to public interest. That was essential to me because I really didn't think I would end up in a big law firm, but I was wowed by my firm's commitment to pro bono. When I was a junior litigator, my pro bono cases provided opportunities to take depositions and argue motions. And that's really how I cut my teeth as a litigator. I did toy with some other possibilities and

---

## If you're going to do this, do it with a hundred percent of your heart and your mind.

---

looked at other firms so I didn't have to commute. But I found I would be sacrificing the intellectual challenge, taking a major pay cut, and leaving behind working relationships that were very rewarding and dear to me.

**Carrie Reilly** (partner at Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz, New York City): The question is interesting for me because I definitely don't think of my firm as a "big firm." Although we do the big transactions and complicated litigations, physically we're just not that big. Even so, though, I'd echo a lot of comments that have been made here, particularly around the intellectual challenges that working at the firm provides. The other reason I don't regret law firm life is because I get to practice with the group of lawyers that I do. From our junior associates through our senior partners, I think everyone is really smart and really interesting and really invested in what we do. That's an energizing and motivating environment to work in.

**Julia M. Jordan:** I definitely don't regret going to Big Law—that doesn't mean that I have not questioned that decision at times, mostly when working late at night. But for all the reasons everyone has said, overall I have absolutely no regrets about

going to my law firm. Although the expectations are high, so are the rewards.

**Maeve O'Connor:** The one thing I would add to all of that is what I find also incredibly important in big firm life is the ability to draw on not only a range of incredible associates but also on a very broad range of partners who have a specialization. Being able to draw on that range of resources to serve the client from across the firm is an aspect of large firm life that can't be replicated in a smaller institution.

**Mary Beth Forshaw:** The other thing is that you grow up with your partners. You make partner with a group of people, and then you grow up together in the practice of law, and you end up running the firm and building the business. There is something very nice and satisfying about that too.

**Lori Lesser:** *We read a lot today about mentors and sponsors and their importance for one's career advancement, particularly for women. Do you have any regrets about having the right mentors and sponsors at pivotal times in your career?*

**Amelia Starr:** My success is largely attributable to the mentors that I have had, and I have had wonderful mentors. Sometimes people make the mistake of thinking that a mentor needs to look like them. Your mentor needs to be someone who you have a connection with, a professional connection and a personal connection. That can happen with a man or a woman or someone who is much older and comes from a very traditional background or someone much younger. It's really all about how you forge that personal connection. So as a young associate you should be very open to finding people that you can work with and that you can trust and not have any preconceived notion about who that person should be or what that person should look like.

**Maria T. Vullo:** You should have more than one mentor. As a young lawyer, you want to learn from a variety of people. The best way to do that is to look at those with whom you are working on the matters to which you're assigned. You could have a mentor who is terrific at teaching you how to write better. You could have a mentor who is great at teaching you what the business of law is all about. You could have a mentor who is more of a personal connection who may help you in your career path. A mentor doesn't have to be working with you on something. Some young lawyers are overly focused on I've got to find a mentor, I've got to find a mentor, and then not actually looking around them to find the people who are available to them and could provide those various roles.

**Maura Barry Grinalds:** Women may need some special help here because most of their mentors don't look like them. The numbers do thin over time with women. Some of it may just be a matter of choice. Big Law is not for everyone. They go off to other exciting adventures. But some of them may get discouraged because we are all still a minority in our firms as partners. So I

believe it is important for women partners to help bring talented women along so that they don't get deterred along the way.

**Kathleen O'Connor:** When I was young, I was lucky because I worked with some terrific people. And the one thing I did right was that I thought a lot about my skill development—kind of picking up on your point, Maria—so I would think, well, I haven't done an appellate brief so I'm going to spend the next year working for someone who does only this appellate work. The thing I was not at all focused on, and I wish I had been, was the world outside my law firm. I was very focused on what was happening in my law firm and my development. Those are all things people should worry about, but I was not thinking about the clients I had really excellent relationships with and maintaining those relationships. I worked for somebody once who said you've got to be out in the world, and that was great advice—advice I wish I had received many years ago.

**Carrie Reilly:** When I was a very junior associate, I was extremely lucky to work with a senior partner at the firm who has ended up being a great resource and source of support over the years. You know, he wasn't a woman, he started at the firm when it was a really different place than when I started, but he taught me so much about being a lawyer. It turns out I also absorbed all this stuff from him about being a lawyer while being an involved parent, which I didn't even appreciate until I started having kids years after we worked together. Two other things about mentoring that I wish I knew when I was younger: First, there's probably no one, single, perfect mentor; you can have a bunch of mentors for different reasons, at different moments, in your career. Second, at least for me, you can also find mentors or role models outside your firm. Ultimately, luck has a lot to do with connecting with the right people. Part of hooking up with the right mentors is luck, but another part is capitalizing on experiences when they come your way, doing really good work for people, and then developing relationships over time.

**Maeve O'Connor:** I maybe have a slightly different perspective. There are those who come into a law firm and they say, "I want to become a partner and how am I'm going to do that?" There are those who come into a law firm and say, "I'm just passing through here for a few years, and then I'm going to go write a novel." I was in the latter category. So I definitely was very engaged in my work. I loved my work. Through that, I developed mentoring relationships despite myself, but I didn't use them as effectively as I would have had I thought to myself, I'm going to stay here. So looking back, could I have built my career in a more focused manner starting at a junior time? Absolutely. I don't know that personally I could have traded those years of sort of exploration and existential discovery because they enabled me to sort of be where I am today, but I would just tell people that even if you come to think you may not want to stay,

engage yourself in your work and the people because you may find yourself happily surprised.

**Maria T. Vullo:** It's important to have formal programs. A lot of mentoring occurs informally, but a formal program allows those people who might be shy or might not have the will to go into someone's office, to actually be part of mentoring. For women, in particular, and persons of color, having a structured mentoring program is really important.

**Lori Lesser:** *Everyone in this room has succeeded in the big firm environment. If you had it to do over again, could the process have been any easier for you?*

**Amelia Starr:** We're all extremely motivated, highly type A people. We wouldn't be sitting around this table if we weren't. Looking back, one thing I would tell myself is give yourself a break. We're hard-working, excellent lawyers, but sometimes we don't have a good day or maybe not even a very good week. I spent a lot of time beating myself up for not hitting the standard that I felt like I should hit. You have to remember this is a long-term process—sometimes you're great and sometimes you're not so great—and that you shouldn't be judging yourself all the time. Sometimes we judge ourselves out of the profession because we think we aren't good enough.

One of the things that I should have done, and I tell the women I'm working with, it's OK. If you're trying hard and you're doing this at the highest level and you're taking chances, which you should be, you are going to blow yourself up once in a while, and that is fine. That is what happens to women and men and lawyers who aspire to do really fabulous work. So forgive yourself. It's OK. Don't think that you have failed. You just move along and no one else thinks you failed either.

**Maria T. Vullo:** That's not just a message for young lawyers trying to become partner. It's a continuum.

**Mary Beth Forshaw:** I agree with you one hundred percent. The best advice I ever got is from a retired female partner of my firm. She said, remember, it's OK to disappoint people. You're never going to always get it right, and the sun is still going to come up in the morning if you only get it right 99 percent of the time. One of the best professional experiences I had is, when I was a brand new baby partner, the two chairmen of the litigation department said I should be staffing partner. Because as staffing partner, I was going to disappoint people every day. Partners didn't always get the staffing they wanted. The associates didn't always like the assignments they were getting. I learned that life went on, even though people maybe were disappointed. It's a really, really important thing, especially for young women coming into the law, to understand that they shouldn't worry about disappointing people. Don't carry it with you. If you do make a mistake, just get up in the morning, go back to work, and do the best job you can and learn from your mistakes.

**Kathleen O'Connor:** There are studies on confidence and women, and in part what they're talking about is that women are sometimes risk averse. We deprive ourselves of opportunities. I always say this to younger lawyers. I say, go to the burn, do what's uncomfortable. Younger women are sometimes more reluctant to take an assignment that they see as requiring skills they don't yet have. I keep saying, "But that's how you get the skills." You've just got to get in there and do it. Yes, you're going to fail, you're going to disappoint, but that's OK. You can't grow in the same way if you don't do those things and get comfortable with it.

---

## It gets my juices going. Whether you win or lose, you invest your whole self in it.

---

**Jennifer Kennedy Park:** There are points in my career where I wish I had been a more vocal advocate for myself for getting certain opportunities that I needed. I had this view that if I was a team player and I always said yes, that would get me ahead. In some ways, that's a very valuable characteristic, but you also have to look for opportunities to be a risk taker. Those opportunities might not always come to you. You may have to search them out. That can be an uncomfortable position to be in, to be somebody who is demanding better or different opportunities. But at the end of the day, whether you stay at Big Law or leave Big Law, the goal is to be the best lawyer you can be. So, if you're not advocating for yourself to get the chances to do that, then what's the point of being there?

**Maeve O'Connor:** I agree with that, that you need to make your own opportunities. You need to say to the partner I'd like to cross-examine that witness. The answer may be yes; the answer may be no. There may be circumstances that the client may want to see the partner doing it. But the very process of asking feeds back into the partner's thinking about your readiness to do the work—you need to make this opportunity for yourself.

**Maria T. Vullo:** Maeve, you've hit it right on. That message, particularly for women, is very, very important because you need to demonstrate the initiative and the confidence that you can do it. Even if you don't personally feel that self-confidence, you need to express that self-confidence. When I was at the firm as a young lawyer, I didn't expect to stay. But I wanted to get as much responsibility as I could. So I reached out for whatever

witnesses or work experiences that I could find. That's my message to all young lawyers, and particularly women lawyers, to assert themselves. On the disappointment part, we might be too hard on ourselves. I'm not so sure that all of those moments reflect actual disappointment by the person to whom you gave the work, but you felt that some little thing that you did is really bigger than it is. In that person's day or week or month, it's a blip.

**Maura Barry Grinalds:** We need to suppress the inner critic. You know, redirect it, keep it focused on the adversary.

**Lori Lesser:** *Does anyone have any regrets about the demands that your career has taken on your personal life?*

**Maeve O'Connor:** Do I wish there were 30 hours in a day? Yes, 30 hours in a day would be really fantastic. Having said that, I feel I've been able to strike a good balance. I have two young children. I work a part-time schedule. I walk out the door every day and I see my children in the evening and I have dinner with my husband and then I get back on the computer. If I have work to do that's overflowing, it tends to take a little bit out of my sleep. But I have not so far had a big problem with it cutting out my time with my children. I've been able to draw those lines and hold them fairly well. Having said that, I'm lucky that I don't perhaps need as much sleep as everybody. So, look, it's a challenge, but it's a question of finding the flexibility to make things work. The more senior you get in the profession, actually the better your ability is to make things work for your schedule. Because litigation is not market-driven the way corporate practice is, where suddenly the deal needs to close on Monday because the market conditions are just right, and there goes your weekend. We have a little bit of a better ability to arrange things to try to make it work.

**Julia M. Jordan:** I also have two small children. It can be challenging at times. Some of my close friends have left the firm to go work elsewhere, and their experience has actually given me a greater appreciation for the flexibility that I have in Big Law. I have the flexibility to go to that doctor's appointment or school event in the morning or even in the middle of the day. I just need to do the work, and I can do it before or after that event.

**Amelia Starr:** You shouldn't expect that your work and your life are in balance. It works [out to a] balance over a longer period. So sometimes your life takes over your work, and sometimes your work takes over your life. Every day is a different day. As long as your expectations are that, overall, you're going to do the things at home that are important, and you're going to do the things that work that are important, and you're going to do them when you have to do them, that it's OK that if at any given point work is dominating or your personal life is dominating. But that flexibility just has to be the hallmark.

**Mary Beth Forshaw:** We are in a service business, and sometimes we can't control the demands that are placed on us by clients and courts and adversaries. But litigation work tends to be



portable. You can bring it home and edit the brief at home. You can bring home the deposition transcript and read it at home. I have a six-foot child now, and I was telling him recently about a women's event that I spoke at where someone asked me about work/life balance. He looked at me and he said, "Come on, you didn't say that your life is perfectly balanced, did you?" I said, "No, I told the audience that I love my job and the folks at home know that I love my job and they know that sometimes my job takes precedence and sometimes my home life takes precedence." He said, "That's right."

**Carrie Reilly:** So I'll jump on the two-young-kids bandwagon as well, because I have two little boys. I don't have any regrets about how my career has impacted my family life so far, but it certainly isn't easy because there are a limited number of hours in a day. That's just a fact. So one thing I've had to get much better at is setting priorities, and not beating myself up if things that are lower down on my priority list—like laundry or thank-you notes—slip a little bit. Or a lot. But, you know, my mom worked while I was growing up and I always really looked up to her for that, and I remember loving, as a kid, seeing the kind of leader that she was. The same goes for my husband and his mom. So I hope my kids will value the fact that I pursued a career, or at least be cool with it, when they get older.

Also, a huge blessing for me is having a great support system, including my parents, and having a husband who is up for figuring out with me how we can both try and manage demanding careers. Lastly, when your kids and your job end up absorbing most of the waking hours in your day, I've been glad that I stuck with a career that I find really fulfilling because when I'm at the office I am doing something that I care about, not waiting for the clock to hit 5:30.

**Kathleen O'Connor:** I have a different experience. I'm only just now getting married and I'm almost 50. Do I think that that's because of the demands of the profession? I don't know. But sometimes I wonder whether I didn't meet the right person sooner because I was always at the office. Some of that's on me. As an associate, I worked very hard. I had a very rough trial schedule, blah, blah, blah. But even with that, I did not stand up for myself. I did not insist on going on a vacation more than once every five years. I thought that my own needs, because they were not tied to a husband or a wife or kids, were illegitimate. It was fine that a colleague went home because she had a child. I did not, so I did not think I ever had a reason to leave the office.

When I went in-house, my boss came to me at some point and said, you know, you need to go on vacation. She said, "Really, we take vacations here. It's important. It's also selfish. You will come back a better lawyer if you take a vacation," which is absolutely true. But it took me that experience to learn that it's OK to take time away. I have actually said this to a lot of young people. It's OK to try to carve out your life, but you're going to have to do it. The firm isn't going to come to you and tell you to go on vacation.

**Maura Barry Grinalds:** I wouldn't be being candid to say I had no regrets along the way. There were times when I was out of town at depositions or hearings and couldn't be where my kids wanted me to be. There were vacations where I was holed up in the hotel room. Over time, it has gotten easier and technology has really helped me strike a balance. I remember getting the first portable fax machine Skadden had. I brought it home and I refused to give it back. So I did not have to go in to the office to send a fax, which was what we used to do in the old days. Later, I was one of the first to get an Internet connection to our office from home—it was a dial-up that was incredibly slow but to me was a whole new lifeline. While there certainly were challenges, as the guinea pig with new technology, trying to work at home, dealing with four kids tugging at my legs, praying that mute button was working, I stuck with it. I'll admit it was hard along the way, but totally worth it.

Another saving grace was picking certain kinds of cases to specialize in at certain points in time. When I was a young associate, I did a lot of federal securities litigation. Researching and writing briefs and reading depositions was quiet work I could do after the kids went to sleep or early in the morning. As they got older, I had more flexibility to do more expedited matters, trials, and injunctions, which rounded out my career.

**Jennifer Kennedy Park:** I would just add I have three kids, two of whom are 13 months, so I'm at the beginning of what everyone is essentially talking about. But the part that I would say—I'm going to quote Sheryl Sandberg—"is making your partner a true partner." I actually think about that at work and at home. So I think about making my partners at the office my true partners, meaning, I'm very communicative about the support needs I have to have in place. So I'm very clear with them: I've got three kids. Here are the expectations. If a call comes in and mommy needs to be at the doctor's, mommy needs to be at the doctor's. We have to staff this in a way that that can happen. Then at home, it's the same way. You have to be very communicative with your partner at home or whoever your support structure is at home.

The only other thing I would say is we're all wonderful and talented, but at Big Law, we're not irreplaceable. I've never thought if there was something that was really important to me in my personal life, that I couldn't turn to one of my partners and say, listen, I have this really important thing—my vacation, I don't want to cancel it, or I have the school play, or whatever—that I couldn't turn to them and say can you step in for me here? Because I'm not in most circumstances a hundred percent irreplaceable. Sometimes you have to step back and remember that.

**Lori Lesser:** *Do you have any regrets about the trends facing our profession as a whole?*

**Jennifer Kennedy Park:** Technology is one that goes the other way sometimes. While it can be a great service, it also can invade your life in a 24/7 way where you could just constantly

feel you're on and the client demands are always on. But Maria used a really great word, which is discipline. You have to be disciplined about and set boundaries for yourself on how you're going to let technology help you and not hinder you as you go forth.

**Maura Barry Grinalds:** You're absolutely right. Technology is not just invading our personal life but accelerating the velocity of legal thought. Our clients want instantaneous answers and shoot tentacles of emails that we in litigation know can create huge problems down the road. So we need discipline in advising the client to take time to deliberate. Clients have to recognize an immediate response is not always the best response. While I respond promptly, I may say I'm going to think about it, I want to talk to some subject matter experts in the firm and, rather than generate a slew of emails, suggest a call for later. We have to make sure that the technology is being used in aid of our profession, not dictating outcomes of our profession.

**Jennifer Kennedy Park:** That's great advice for young lawyers, too, who are growing up in this world of instantaneous communication. I have a tech client who once said to me that their goal with this product they were developing was to decrease the time between intention and action. I thought, oh, gosh, that's horrible. I actually spend my life trying to increase the time between intention and action. That's great advice for young lawyers, to take the moment, to take the time to be deliberative. Don't instantly respond. Read the emails before you send them. Think about whether an email is the right way to communicate something, because we are forgetting the phone and we're leaving trails behind us that other litigators have to clean up.

**Kathleen O'Connor:** But technology, while liberating in many respects, has also diminished how we function as a team. I remember every night having dinner with the partner I worked with—and not that that was fun for him; he wasn't with his children—but I learned so much around that pantry table. People are learning less—everything that happens because people are talking and things are percolating is getting eaten away.

**Amelia Starr:** I'm going to date myself, but when we did document production when I was an associate, that meant 300 boxes in a very large room, pizza, and a radio. We were together and we talked about the documents and our lives. There was a real camaraderie. Electronic document production sadly means that everybody is sitting in their office or somewhere with a computer.

Kathleen is right, one of the things that we are working on is making sure people are staying connected. Because you are not as good a lawyer by yourself. You are 10 times the lawyer when you're with three of your colleagues. Email, computer document review, video phone, and all these things are pushing us apart. To really, really access the strength of being in a big firm, you've got to get people in the same room.

**Maeve O'Connor:** Another issue related to that is that there's a lot of client pressure that they won't pay for a meeting. You just have to say, well, then we will eat the meeting, because we need to get this team together and talk through the issues.

**Kathleen O'Connor:** When I was a client, I thought, "Please meet." You would get bills and you could tell nobody had talked to each other. I wanted people to meet because that is where the good stuff happens.

**Mary Beth Forshaw:** Being a lawyer in any firm now can be an isolating experience. As a result, it can be hard for firms to pass on their culture and to build the collegiality that we all pride ourselves on, clearly, from the discussions in this room. We all need to figure out ways to get around the isolating effect of technology.

**Maria T. Vullo:** This is a broader issue, beyond just the work that we do, because the reduction in in-person contact that technology has created is a broad issue overall about people not connecting with each other. It is incumbent on us to meet, for our own personal sanity, and also to meet clients in person. Videoconference just doesn't substitute. That in-person contact is really important to building a collaborative long-term relationship.

**Lori Lesser:** *The readership of this article will be people of all ages, including a lot of young lawyers. Is there a final piece of advice that we haven't covered already?*

**Maria T. Vullo:** Don't assume you'll have no regrets, but do your best to enjoy it along the way because if you don't enjoy it, then it's not worth doing. If you can't achieve the perfect balance, but you're enjoying it, then you'll end up just fine.

**Amelia Starr:** Yes, but go all in. If you're going to do this, do it with a hundred percent of your heart and your mind. You may decide after a year that this isn't for you, but if you really, really dedicated yourself to it, then it will have been a valuable year. If you do it for the rest of your career, that's great too. But don't do it with half a heart.

**Carrie Reilly:** Be yourself. Chances are you've been pretty successful so far in your life doing just that. Be tough because you'll inevitably come across people who will want to knock you down or make you feel less worthy than you are, and you just can't let them.

**Maeve O'Connor:** Don't leave precipitously. If you were drawn to this profession for a reason, and maybe in your first couple of years you're struggling for one reason or another, maybe you're assigned to a case that you don't enjoy or you're working with a partner who you don't connect with, don't conclude that you need to leave the profession. It's a fantastic profession, and it may be a place where you could thrive if you stick it out, perhaps take a different job and try for a couple more years and see what you can do.

**Maura Barry Grinalds:** Believe you can pursue your passion in law, whatever that may be, and do so. You will not regret it. ■