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Women Partners: A Slow Process Picks Up Speed

Big Connecticut firms have made some progress in admitting women to their partnership ranks—and 1999 should bring further improvements.

By SCOTT BREDE

Shipman & Goodwin employment litigator Susan C. Freedman admits it was a bit unnerving to learn that she was one of five women lawyers at the Hartford-based firm to be up for partner this year.

Her trepidation, however, was based on the *number* of candidates in the running, not on what gender they happened to be, Freedman says.

“That’s a lot of people to make partner all at once—women or men,” she says.

Too many?

Shipman & Goodwin partners didn’t think so. At the firm’s Sept. 26 partnership retreat, all five attorneys easily won the support they needed to join Shipman’s upper tier, says Managing Partner Scott L. Murphy. Their elevation to partner status will be official as of Jan. 1.

Murphy calls the fact that all five of those eligible to make partner this year were women a “happy coincidence.”

“We’re not looking for a pat on the back,” he declares. “This was an entirely self-interested decision. We did it for the good, old-fashioned reason that we think these people will be great contributors to the firm over time.”

Though women partners at the state’s largest firms still don’t come close to matching their male counterparts in terms of sheer quantity, Shipman’s recent partnership vote isn’t the only sign that 1999 will bring improvement.

Hartford’s Day, Berry & Howard, which came under criticism a year ago when it made five men partners, but passed over two other female nominees, is again inviting five attorneys into its inner realm this coming year. But this time around, the select group includes two women attorneys, says Robert G. Siegel, a member of Day, Berry’s



Five freshly minted partners at Shipman & Goodwin are, clockwise from top left: Kimberly A. Mango; Julie A. Manning; Robin G. Frederick; Susan C. Freedman; and Christine L. Chinni.

executive committee.

At Stamford’s Cummings & Lockwood, two of the six incoming partners, as of Jan 1., are women, as are two of the three soon-to-be partners at New Haven’s Tyler Cooper & Alcorn.

Partnership candidates are still sweating it out at the other six “Top 10” grossing firms in the state, as defined by *The Connecticut Law Tribune’s* latest annual “Trib 10” survey of firms’ gross revenues. Until the big vote is taken, managing partners at those firms generally decline to specify the gender makeup of those knocking on the partnership door.

By the Numbers

Still, there’s no doubting that women partners at many of those 10 firms already have reached—or are well on their way to attaining—a critical mass.

As of Jan. 1, women lawyers at Shipman & Goodwin will comprise just under a quarter of the firm’s partnership. (See chart.) That’s 14 of Shipman’s 58 partners, to be exact.

Among “Trib 10” firms, New Haven’s Wiggin & Dana (10 women out of 47 partners) closely trails Shipman on a percentage basis, with women currently holding claim to roughly 21 percent of the

Taking the Glare Off the Glass Ceiling

WOMEN PARTNERS

With five women joining its partnership ranks as of Jan. 1, Hartford's Shipman & Goodwin likely will have the highest percentage of women partners among the top 10 grossing law firms in Connecticut, as defined by *The Connecticut Law Tribune's* latest annual "Trib 10" survey of firms' gross revenues. As noted, some firms, including New Haven's Wiggin & Dana and Bridgeport-based Pullman & Comley, have yet to make their partnership decisions for the coming year.

<u>Firm</u>	<u># of Partners</u>	<u># of Women Partners</u>	<u>Percentage of Women Partners</u>
Cummings & Lockwood	91	15	16.5
Day, Berry & Howard	90	8	8.9
Halloran & Sage*	35	2	5.7
Hebb & Gitlin*	23	1	4.3
Murtha, Cullina, Richter and Pinney*	42	6	14.3
Pullman & Comley*	36	7	19.4
Robinson & Cole*	67	5	7.5
Shipman & Goodwin	58	14	24.1
Tyler Cooper & Alcorn	37	6	16.2
Wiggin & Dana*	47	10	21.3

* Firms have yet to vote on new partners for the coming year.

firm's upper tier. Obviously, that could change once Wiggin elects new partners for the coming year.

Bridgeport's Pullman & Comley (19.4 percent), Cummings & Lockwood (16.5 percent), Tyler Cooper (16.2 percent) and Hartford's Murtha, Cullina, Richter and Pinney (14.3 percent) follow. Women attorneys at the remaining four firms—DBH, Robinson & Cole, Halloran & Sage and Hebb & Gitlin, all based in Hartford—make up less than 10 percent of the partners.

"It's a slow process. But if one can be patient, one can definitely see a change for the better," says Day, Berry partner Lyn Gammill Walker, who, earlier this year, became the first female to serve on the firm's five-member executive committee.

Adds Day Berry's Siegel: "My expectation is that, with each passing year, we will be making more and more women partners."

As for last year's vote, when the bids of the only two women in the race were dashed, Siegel says it had nothing to do with the candidates' gender. Jumping to Day, Berry's top level requires a 90

percent majority vote by the firm's partnership, Siegel notes. "That means a lot of good people don't make partner," he says.

Still the vote hurt associate morale, according to some Day, Berry lawyers participating in a recent nationwide survey of mid-level associates by *The American Lawyer*, and led to a front-page article last month in *The National Law Journal*. (Both are sister publications of the *Law Tribune*.) In the article, a former DBH associate expressed surprise that the firm "didn't go out of [its] way to mentor and get these women up in the ranks." (See "Day, Berry's Gender Gap," *The National Law Journal*, Oct. 5, 1998.)

Day, Berry, says Siegel, has begun pairing women associates with women partners in an effort to guide more women to partnership. It also formed a "sensitivity" committee this year to help foster the advancement of women and minorities at the firm, he says.

Like DBH, firms such as Robinson & Cole, Halloran & Sage and Hebb & Gitlin also expect to make more women partners in the coming years, based on the large

percentage of women associates currently scaling the firms' partnership tracks.

Presently, Hebb & Gitlin has just one female partner. Halloran has just two.

"We've been trying to recruit more [women] both out of law school and laterally," says Michael J. Reilly, Hebb's managing director.

As part of the effort, three out of the nine members on its recruiting committee are now women, according to Kristine A. Holland, the firm's director of marketing.

Breaching the Glass Ceiling

Will Shipman & Goodwin's vote send a message to law grads that it is a place where women can advance to the firm's highest levels?

"I hope that's always been the perception," says Murphy, its managing partner.

Among leadership positions at the firm held by women partners, Saranne P. Murray serves on Shipman's six-member management committee, while Deborah Smith Frisone heads its securities practice. Partner Donna L. Brooks also was recently appointed as co-chair of Shipman's

WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT

Despite advances by women attorneys, men still hold the lion's share of management positions in the state's top 10 grossing law firms.

<u>Firm</u>	<u># of Seats on firm's Management or Executive Committee</u>	<u># of Those Seats Held by Women</u>
Cummings & Lockwood	10	0
Day, Berry & Howard	5	1
Halloran & Sage	6	0
Hebb & Gitlin	3	1*
Murtha, Cullina, Richter and Pinney	5	1
Pullman & Comley	3	1
Robinson & Cole	5	0
Shipman & Goodwin	6	1
Tyler Cooper & Alcorn	**	**
Wiggin & Dana	10	4

* The woman member of Hebb & Gitlin's executive committee is a nonlawyer, Chief Operating Officer Sylvia M. Jackson.

** Tyler Cooper doesn't have a management committee. It has a managing partner and two assistant managing partners, none of whom are women.

venture capital and intellectual property practice group.

But how many firms can say they have more practice groups headed by women than practice groups headed by men?

Probably not many, says Noel E. Hanf, managing partner of Wiggin & Dana. The New Haven-based firm, he says, has seven practice groups, four of which are chaired by women: Linda L. Randell (utilities); Melinda A. Agsten (health care); Susan J. Bryson (real estate); and Sherry L. Dominick (employment and benefits).

"I would be surprised if there was a higher proportion [of women practice group heads] almost anywhere," says Hanf.

At Tyler Cooper, leadership roles also aren't handed out on the basis of gender, says Margaret P. Mason, co-chair of the firm's litigation department. "There isn't any work here that is considered men's work or women's work," Mason says.

That's been the case ever since she started at the firm in 1978, when it was named Tyler, Cooper, Grant, Bowerman & Keefe, Mason adds. Former litigation partner Donald Keefe "made me feel immediately that I was one of them," she says.

Pullman & Comley's three-member

executive committee includes one woman partner, Deborah S. Breck, who also chairs the firm's trusts and estates department. In addition, Elizabeth J. Austin heads up the firm's bankruptcy section.

"I don't know if it's been shattered," Austin says of the so-called glass ceiling that has hampered women lawyers from rising to the top of the profession. "I think it has a few cracks in it. . . . But it varies from firm to firm," she says.

Other than Wiggin & Dana, none of the "Trib 10" firms have more than one woman member on their executive or management committees. (*See chart.*)

Robinson & Cole, for example, has no woman management committee members, though, at one point it did, says Jack S. Kennedy, the firm's managing partner. That was before former partner Janet C. Hall was sworn in as a U.S. District judge last year, Kennedy says.

Cummings & Lockwood's 10-member management committee also is lacking in that regard. But the firm hopes to appoint a woman to the panel in the near future, says Peter A. Giuliani, C&L's nonlawyer executive director. "We would like to make that happen sometime soon," he says.

Part-time Partners

One area that Cummings & Lockwood is satisfied with is the accommodations it makes to attorneys with family constraints.

"We believe we have one of the best, most aggressive associate maternity leave policies," says Giuliani. New mothers there get 12 weeks of paid leave, he says.

"We've been very accommodating . . . partly because these people are all superstars," he adds.

What about working mothers—or fathers for that matter—who opt to work reduced hours?

Lawyers who go part-time aren't barred automatically from becoming partners—at least not at his firm, says Giuliani. In fact, two C&L partners are working on part-time arrangements right now, he says.

Day, Berry's Walker says she's never worked a full-time schedule during her entire career at the firm—and she's been a partner there since 1988.

Though she's usually in the office five days a week, when her children were younger, she would leave each day by 1 p.m., Walker says. Now that they're older, her schedule is more erratic. Some days, Walker is there from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Other days, she arrives in the morning by 10 and

is out by 3 in the afternoon, she says.

"Part-time status is a factor in partnership considerations," admits Shipman & Goodwin's Murphy. But it certainly isn't viewed as an instant death sentence for someone's career at the firm, he says.

One of Shipman's five new partners, Julie A. Manning, says she gave birth last year and went on a reduced work schedule in March. (See sidebar.)

Including Manning, four of the 14 women partners at the firm, says Murphy, work on some type of a part-time arrangement. Some show up every day, but leave by 4 p.m. Others work three days a week in the office, and the other two days at home. It differs from person to person, says Murphy.

"At some level, we don't think of partners as being part-time," he says. "... [L]ike any other partner, they're likely to be working at home and on weekends."

Child Care Made Easier

Wiggin & Dana's Randell, who heads the firm's utilities practice, says she was pregnant when she was made a partner in 1980. Not only has it never been an issue, but also, says Randell, the firm has bent over backward to help her maintain a full-time schedule, says Randell.

Randell recounts the many long state Department of Public Utility Control hearings on electric rates she attended in 1989 as an example. Her daughter was nine, and there were some days when hearings went late and "I just couldn't pick her up" at school, Randell says. On those occasions, the firm sent messengers to get her daughter, and she would wait in Randell's office until the hearings were over. "I don't know if any other firm would have been that helpful or supportive," she says.

"Clients were that way, too," Randell adds, citing the times she agreed to early morning meetings under the condition that she could bring her daughter along. "For me, as a single mother it was absolutely necessary," she says.

As for the number of women partners at Wiggin, don't ask Randell. She doesn't keep track of them all. "It's not so few that you know" exactly how many there are, she says.

And Randell expects her attention to such numbers to further wane as more women are welcomed into the partnership. "It's in the firm's self-interest"

Fitting in the Family

Shipman's new women partners find the Connecticut firm environment leaves room for family—and a life outside of work.

Shipman & Goodwin's Robin G. Frederick has seen both sides of the coin, having been an associate in Manhattan before settling here in Connecticut.

Guess which experience she likes better. It's not too hard. Just listen to Frederick talk about her present job.

"Shipman is a firm that values [its lawyers having] an outside life," says Frederick, one of five women attorneys who will become partners at the firm as of Jan 1. "I don't think it's a gender-specific thing. . . . People are into their families here. It's nice."

A mother of two and a former associate at New York's Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson, Frederick says she couldn't imagine raising a family while working in the Big Apple as an attorney.

It's not that her former firm was out-and-out unfriendly to women with family constraints, she says. It's just that there's a "very different mentality" at a firm that is handling billion-dollar deals, says Frederick. Attorneys have much less control over their own lives, "especially if you're a young lawyer who doesn't have a lot of responsibility," she adds.

Frederick's colleague and soon-to-be partner Christine L. Chinni agrees with her co-worker's assessment of Shipman. "Obviously, [the firm] wants people to work hard," says Chinni. "But it's not the sort of place where people are patrolling the halls to see who's here and who's not here," she says.

Nor is it a firm that would keep associates from becoming partner just because they had families to take care of and couldn't keep up with the demands of a full-time work schedule.

Just ask Julie A. Manning, who gave birth last year and went part-time just as she was coming up for partner.

"I didn't know one way or the other what would happen," Manning says of the recent partnership vote. But she got the nod and "I couldn't be happier," she says.

Susan C. Freedman, another lawyer at the firm moving up to the coveted plateau, says she was initially part-time when she joined Shipman in 1992, coming from Washington, D.C.'s Verner, Liipfert, Bernhard, McPherson and Hand.

But then her superiors "looked at my hours and said, 'You're working full-time, you ought to be paid full-time,'" Freedman says.

Working full-time at Verner, Liipfert meant being at the office until 7:30 or 8 at night, partly because the work day tends to start later in D.C. than it does here in Connecticut, she says. There was no way she could work those hours and get home in time to take care of her family.

But at Shipman, she can work full-time and still be home most evenings, says Freedman. For one thing, she doesn't have the horrid commute she had when she was working in Washington, she notes.

A former middle- and high-school teacher before earning her law degree, Freedman says there's a presumption that teaching is a much easier profession for working parents than private practice. That isn't necessarily the case anymore, she says.

—Scott Brede

to continue to promote women, she adds. With competition for bright lawyers being what it is, "you cannot afford not to pay attention to a whole group of competent people," she says.

"We're catching up to our clients," adds Day, Berry's Walker, noting the growing number of women who are general counsel at companies such as SNET and Northeast Utilities.

"Things are only getting better," she says. "I wouldn't be here [at Day, Berry] if I didn't think that was the case." ■

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