

TABLE OF EXPERTS

Women in Law

BY HOLLY DOLEZALEK, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal held a panel discussion recently about women in law. Panelists included Anne Regan, an attorney at Hellmuth & Johnson; Jana Aune Deach, an attorney at Moss & Barnett; and Melinda Hugdahl, an attorney and development director at Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid. Kathy Robideau, market president and publisher for the Business Journal, served as moderator.

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MODERATOR



KATHY ROBIDEAU
Market President & Publisher
Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal

Kathy Robideau was promoted to market president and publisher of the Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal in February 2016. Robideau led the Business Journal's advertising team since 2010. Prior to that, she was chief operating officer of Winter Park, Fla.-

based Nurse Staffing. She is a member of the Itasca Project and serves on the boards of the St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce, Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce, YMCA Eagan and the Thielen Foundation. She is the president and founder of the Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal's Women's Leadership Council. She attended the University of Cincinnati and is a graduate of Capella University.

PANELISTS



ANNE REGAN
Attorney
Hellmuth & Johnson

Anne Regan is a partner at Hellmuth & Johnson. She advocates for private and public clients in large-scale commercial and employment litigation across the country, in cases involving the health care, medical device, pharmaceutical, food and agriculture, financial services, transportation,

insurance, and manufacturing sectors. She has experience in all aspects of pre-trial and appellate practice, as well as class action and multi-district litigation. Anne has represented businesses and individuals in complex litigation involving antitrust, consumer fraud, employment, environmental law, intellectual property, products liability, and securities fraud claims, as well as businesses in insurance-related claims and disputes.



JANA AUNE DEACH
Attorney
Moss & Barnett

Jana Aune Deach is a nationally recognized family law practitioner with Moss & Barnett who serves as a compassionate advocate for her clients and their children. Jana is a Rule 114 Qualified Neutral and is certified in Family Law Mediation.

Jana has been listed in Minnesota Super Lawyers/Rising Stars since 2005 and has been listed in Minnesota Super Lawyers "Top 50 Women" and "Top 100" lists since 2018. Jana has also been included in The Best Lawyers in America since 2014. She is a member of the American Bar Association, Minnesota State Bar Association, Hennepin County Bar Association - Family Law Section, Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, and Douglas K. Amdahl Inn of Court.

In addition to practicing family law on a full-time basis, Jana serves on Moss & Barnett's Management Committee and Board of Directors; chairs the firm's Family Law practice group; and chairs the firm's philanthropic committee.



MELINDA HUGDAHL
Attorney & Development Director
Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid

Melinda Hugdahl is the Development Director at Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid, and the Director of the Fund for Legal Aid. She also serves on Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid's senior management team. A passionate attorney and advocate for equal justice, she has spent her legal career in private

practice, state government, and as a lobbyist and advocate before the Minnesota legislature, state agencies, and the Minnesota Judicial Branch. Ms. Hugdahl is a frequent speaker at local, statewide, and national events. She is a graduate of Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, and William Mitchell College of Law, now Mitchell Hamline College of Law.

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Kathy Robideau: What do women attorneys love about practicing law?

Jana Aune Deach: The practice of law is challenging. That's why we love it! We analyze complex issues and distill them to an understandable issue and solution. As a family law attorney, I guide not just my client but their family through a very painful and emotional process. Helping people is what motivates me and makes my work so compelling.

The friendship and community among female attorneys is amazing. We support each other's practices, offer each other advice, and reach out to women at other firms.

Robideau: Anne, you practice in class action and multidistrict litigation. What are some of the initiatives you've seen to help diversify the pool of attorneys who lead and manage these cases?

Anne Regan: Our practice is one of those few areas where the courts have a say in who is appointed to lead a case. Under Rule 23, and the rules that are also applied to the multidistrict litigation, the courts frequently issue case management orders where they say they want to have a diverse group of applicants, whether it's race, gender, age, as well as a representative slice of the legal profession. So, in the past 10 years, that's been a focus of the federal judiciary. On the defense side, there's been a big push for companies adopting the Mansfield rule or similar DEI initiatives. They want a diverse group of attorneys representing them. So that's really changed too on the defense side.

Robideau: Anne, would you say the efforts by the court translate to meaningful work on a day-to-day basis?

Regan: In most cases, yes, especially if women are appointed to leadership positions. Following up on what Jana said, they know they need to share, delegate, involve and promote other attorneys, even attorneys from different firms. The court may appoint a class action firm from Minneapolis, and then another from Chicago, and another from New York. And we all get to know each other and work with each other, even if we've never worked together before. Particularly within the plaintiffs' bar, there are many groups of women who get together for conferences to ensure we all know who each other are and that we're promoting women through the ranks. But there are certain practice areas that are just less diverse in general - antitrust and securities litigation, for example. That's changing, I think, through excellent leadership by the courts, as well as law firms who are getting new partners and associates appointed to leadership roles.

Robideau: How have your views on mentorship changed, if at all, over the course of your legal career?

Hugdahl: They've changed a lot. Earlier in my career, I had a wonderful mentor who really helped me navigate challenges both personal and professional. I also really bonded with a group of women attorneys in the generation before me. They had a different experience than I did, and I've learned a lot from them. I've carried that philosophy of both the personal and professional with me now that I've moved from being the mentee into becoming the mentor. I feel a sense of responsibility to the women who came before me to help women succeed and continue to redefine what "success" is about. Women lawyers have a lot of expectations and roles, and finding the right balance is what's going to strengthen women in the profession. I'm also more aware of my own privilege and using that leverage to build a more diverse profession.

Deach: I would not be anywhere without the mentors I have had in my life. From my law school professors to



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- Melinda Hugdahl

attorneys I worked with who saw my abilities before I could recognize them, they encouraged and inspired me. My mentors made suggestions about organizations to become involved in, conferences to attend, experts to work with, how to approach a case, and the list goes on.

A good mentor doesn’t just give you the answers or hand you the solution. A good mentor helps you discover the answer or solution yourself. We all need that kind of mentorship - someone who is a leader in their practice area, will champion you when needed, be a coach, be a sounding board, talk you through that court of appeals brief you are writing, and help you navigate issues in your career.

Robideau: What is some of the worst advice or direction that you’ve received on how to be a woman lawyer?

Hugdahl: When I started out, we were told how to dress and how to look. You wore a suit, but it had to include a skirt that went below your knees. Jewelry, but not too much jewelry, and makeup, but not too much makeup. Thank goodness so much of that has changed. Obviously, you need to look professional, but with women leading in the profession, and the profession

becoming more diverse, it’s opened the door to a movement for all women to reflect more of their own cultural backgrounds, personalities, and who they are, instead of fitting into the “woman lawyer” box.

Regan: The “advice” that was probably not appropriate for me was, when I was pregnant with our first child, and then subsequently, I think there was a perception that things would change with respect to the quality of my work or what I did. There were some attorneys who made certain assumptions about my capacity for work after that point. I’m also not one who believes in this work-life balance idea. I’m on the work-life integration spectrum.

Robideau: Because work-life balance doesn’t exist. I think we’ve all come to terms with that.

Regan: I think it’s a misnomer. It’s really about being able to get

everything done in a way you get it done. I’ve accepted the fact that the laundry is never going to be folded and put away, and that’s okay. But being able to devote your life energy to the things that matter to you, and that mean a lot to you, that’s what is important. But on the plaintiff side, I think there is the idea that you don’t have to be a corporate lawyer per se, and you don’t have to look like a corporate lawyer to be successful.

Deach: When I started practicing law in 1999, the definition of a “successful” attorney was often becoming a partner or shareholder in a big firm, having a substantial book of business, and working 2,000-plus hours a year. That may still be the definition of success to many attorneys, which is great. But I think this mindset has shifted over the past several years and newer attorneys view “success” as having work-life balance — however you define it — a

practice that you are passionate about and aligns with your values and goals, working with clients in a meaningful way, work that is intellectually satisfying, and making a difference.

Robideau: Anne, how does your firm support women obtaining leadership roles?

Regan: Hellmuth & Johnson has been very supportive of me and our class action practice since I came here in 2016. I’m part of the first generation of class action litigators here, and I lead the practice area. We’ve had a lot of success to date, including being appointed lead counsel in multiple class actions and to leadership roles in multidistrict litigation. As long as we’re making educated, solid decisions about how we invest our time, my partners are very supportive. We’re all very aware of the risks of contingency litigation, and we want to make sure we are making wise investments in time and talent and doing well by our clients.

Hugdahl: We have, in the past 10 years, had two women executive directors, including our first African American woman serving as executive director. Most of our leadership team at Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid are women. There’s a long history of women in the

nonprofit sector, but we need to ensure that we have more diverse women in leadership positions. We need to do better, and I've seen how increased diversity changes and strengthens the conversation. During my nearly 15 years as a lobbyist at the state Legislature, the number of women and diverse women really increased. It was great to see, and the dynamics of the issues raised, and how they were debated and resolved, changed for the better. I'm hopeful that as people come through the leadership ranks, we ensure opportunities for other women and other women of color, in particular.

Deach: In a firm of our size, leadership used to mean positions on the board of directors, which is comprised of six individuals. M & B has started to focus on nonboard leadership roles, such as head of the associate committee, strategic planning committee, manager of the paralegals, and other critically important roles that women play in the

overall management and advancement of the firm. These roles allow individuals to have direct access and input to the board.

Robideau: Anne, what are some of the differences you've observed between how women and men lead class action cases?

Regan: I don't know if I noticed that difference along gender lines, as much as I do based on geography and sometimes even specific law firm culture. Some law firms have their own DNA, and you think, "Oh, yeah, there are a lot of similarities between you guys even if none of you are related." There are definite generational differences. In the generation before me of lawyers who are now in 40 years of practice, there are probably more men in that generation, just based on admission rates to law schools, and who was going to law schools in the 1970s and '80s.

Robideau: How do you manage stress with all that goes into what you

do?

Regan: I hope I do it in a healthy way. At some points, there's nothing you can do except to work right through it, and just hope you're getting enough sleep to be able to manage your emotions. I'm not saying it's inappropriate to have emotions, of course, but you don't want to take it out on the people around you. The pandemic was actually kind of liberating for me. Both me and my family adapted to that weird rhythm of the day, when in certain blocks of time, we're all working, we're doing something together, and then you're taking a break and going out for a walk, or whatever. I learned that it's actually OK for me to not be working between noon and 2 p.m. Being able to choose when I work was something that I started doing. I didn't announce I was doing it. I became less deadline sensitive. Of course, I'm meeting the deadline. [If] it's two weeks from now, I don't have to think about it right this very moment when I should

be taking care of myself.

Hugdahl: I know a lot of women who really hit points in their career, depending on the area of law they're working in, where they've said, "This is impacting my health. I can't do this anymore." There's been more support for those shifts happening. It feels like there is more freedom to make choices for yourself than there used to be.

Deach: Finding that core group of friends and colleagues where you can debrief about a case, your day, your life, or anything else you need to talk about was critical for me. A consult group, so to speak. People who understand the work we do, because they do it, too. Knowing you are not alone in this work is really key. And taking time for that vacation, that important family event, coffee with a friend, I find really helps decrease stress and makes me a more productive attorney.

Regan: There are certain practice areas — family law, criminal law —

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Jana Aune Deach Moss & Barnett Family Law

Jana Aune Deach and Moss & Barnett's Family Law Team offer an unparalleled blend of creativity, common sense, and compassion, backed by decades of experience in the most personal of legal practices.

Jana serves as a director on Moss & Barnett's Board of Directors, and her inspired, visionary, and compassionate leadership has been essential to the ongoing success of Moss & Barnett. We are honored to know Jana as our colleague and friend.

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where secondary trauma is an issue. Maybe it means you shift from certain kinds of family law cases to different kinds. I think there's more acceptance at my firm for work life integration. We are not one of those high billable hours, you have to put your nose to the grindstone from eight to seven every day, type firms. We want people to have time, not just to learn the skills they need to have, but also to build relationships with potential clients, with their friends, to have time to do those things that fill your bucket outside of the day-to-day law practice.

Hugdahl: We have a four-and-a-half-day work week. We pay people for full time, but we are closed on Friday

afternoons, and we encourage people to take that half day and do something else.

Robideau: Tell us about a time that you had to be bold about change. What advice would you offer our readers on what lesson you learned from that?

Deach: As women, especially, we have not been conditioned to trust our instinct and inner voice and we tend to doubt our abilities. I had to learn to be bold and speak up in client meetings or meetings with a senior attorney to discuss cases, and I learned that what I had to say was valuable. I offered a different perspective that others had not considered, and my input was important and at times was the impetus

to win the case or reach a settlement. Once I started to be bolder and speak up, clients would directly ask me what I thought. I became bolder to ask to handle hearings, depositions or portions of a trial. I was very fortunate to work with attorneys who pushed my ideas forward with clients and supported me.

Those of us who are in leadership positions or are more senior attorneys need to model to younger attorneys that their voice is important, their thoughts and ideas are valuable.

Hugdahl: Being bold is a risk, for sure. For example, I've moved away from actively practicing law. I still keep my license active, because being a lawyer is still really important to my

sense of identity and community. But I had to be bold in redefining what that meant and how it fit with the rest of my life. What I learned is that I needed that sense of mission, and to continue my commitment to equal justice. My current role does that, just in a different way. As for advice - Take the time to really be thoughtful and set your own course rather than it being set by others' expectations. Chances are, if you're a woman in the legal profession, you have choices and leverage that women in a lot of other places in life do not have. Thank goodness, other women have gotten us to this point where we can make decisions that women before us could not make.

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