

# Lean In

sparks success connections at

# Kirkland & Ellis



The women Partners of Kirkland & Ellis.

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*irkland & Ellis, a global law firm with 1,600 attorneys, represents clients in such matters as litigation, restructuring, and intellectual property. With offices scattered throughout North America, Asia, and Europe, Kirkland is committed to fostering diversity and supporting its women professionals at all career stages.*

By Alanna Klapp

This commitment was further demonstrated in July 2013 when Kirkland signed on as an official partner with Lean In, the organization started by Facebook's chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg to complement the publication of her book, *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*. Lean In has created a dialogue in several countries about the challenges women come across at work and encouraged them to achieve their professional goals.

Kirkland's participation with Lean In is an extension of the Women's Leadership Initiative, a mentoring and professional development program for women attorneys. "The beautiful thing about the WLI is we interface with women around the firm that we may not otherwise have an opportunity to through our practices," says Chicago partner Linda K. Myers, a member of Kirkland's Global Management Team and one of the WLI founders. What began as a small group has grown to about 80 local office programs which hold a variety of events for networking, training, and mentoring.

### Creating a way to connect for junior associates

The genesis for the WLI occurred in October 2003 at the annual all-partners meeting when Myers, who at the time was a relatively new equity partner, spoke on a diversity panel with some colleagues. At the time, the diversity committee had been formed but wasn't developed and Myers struggled to prepare for the presentation. "I remember making jokes and putting the senior partners in dresses to be funny and it was not so great," Myers says. When she got off the stage, however, a group of women praised the presentation and expressed their desire for similar programs. They wanted to find a way to connect women in the company. This put the idea into Myers' head to have a women's initiative across Kirkland. "There was enough interest that rolled from that attempt to do an interesting presentation

with not a lot of material, I knew we had something in the making," Myers says.

The first WLI event was held in January 2004 and the group now has separate funding, recognition for management, and bonus credits for women involved in the initiatives. The associates now do more of the event planning for the program than the senior partners do.

"I think because it's done at the local level with a lot of input from the junior lawyers as to what they wish the program to be, and it's shaped and molded in that way, it's very dynamic," London partner Rajinder Bassi says. "It's a great pathway for junior attorneys to ask questions about their careers and get guidance." Past events featured a United Kingdom comedian performing on the topic of assertiveness in London, Chicago, and New York. Events are unique to each local office but also shared throughout the firm.

### Creating a way to empower

From Kirkland's diversity committee and the WLI grew the Gender Subcommittee, co-chaired by Bassi and New York partner Jennifer Morgan. The subcommittee publicizes diversity initiatives, coordinates charitable dollars in the diversity space, trains, and mentors. "We're all over every affinity group interest trying to make things happen here at Kirkland and in the legal industry generally, and so I think Lean In is just another facet of what we're doing particularly in the gender space," Myers says.

Jennifer Morgan agrees and says the push to join Lean In came from Kirkland's junior associates. "I feel like that's typical Kirkland to be responsive, not just from the top down but also from the bottom up," she says. "I think that official empowerment may lead

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Prominent general counsel were among those weighing in on diversity, leadership and work-life balance at the inaugural event for The Center for WorkLife Law and The New Girls' Network, an organization that aims to turn social science into real-life strategies for women looking to climb the corporate ladder. The event was sponsored by the Kirkland & Ellis Women's Leadership Initiative.



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### Sharing success strategies

The WLI looks forward to including the Lean In aspects of social networking, online learning, and small group mentoring with its existing programs for both male and female employees. The women attorneys at Kirkland want to form Lean In Circles, small groups who meet on a regular basis to learn and share experiences. The circles will be operated by the attorneys with the option to include associates from other law firms or professional contacts. Lean In book club events are also in the works.

Myers thinks Lean In extends Kirkland's award-winning diversity programs and highlights a conversation about workplace functionality. Sandberg writes about the different working styles of women and uses her own style as the example. Professional women juggle soccer games and pediatrician appointments with jobs that sometimes require them to be available at all hours. “It's recognizing and giving an acceptance to the fact that lots of professional women do that,” Myers

says. The book discusses technology choices such as Blackberries to allow employees to eat dinner with their families and have the ability to work from home after dinner. The intended result is more productive and balanced employees of both genders.

### Capitalizing on star power

Myers says the appeal of *Lean In* is Sheryl Sandberg's star power, which put a face to women's workplace concerns. “I think it's been a nice way to use that fact around here to put more women in leadership roles, to ask more women to chair committees and take on different initiatives,” Myers says. The movement is more accepted because of the current conversation Sandberg sparked.

“This book helps to make it more comfortable for the firms to embrace the importance of it,” Myers says. “As more women get into positions of power, the economic case is there for the firm to do it because we need to be able to present talented women to women clients.” Kirkland's participation with Lean In enhances its diversity initiatives. Mentoring, training, and small group meetings open an honest and productive dialogue about how to overcome modern workplace challenges to empower professionals to achieve objectives. **PDJ**

*The book Lean In, by Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg, encouraged women to pursue their ambitions and changed the conversation from what they can't do to what they can do. LeanIn.Org is the next chapter, offering women ongoing inspiration, education, and community to support their efforts to achieve their goals.*

