

Women's Initiative

White and Williams is committed to recruiting, retaining and advancing women. The Women's Initiative was established to enhance the professional and personal development of our women lawyers and to foster their success in the workplace.

The Women's Initiative is guided by a steering committee who works to develop educational programs, networking opportunities and charitable activities that help to foster a supportive and inclusive workplace.

ASK THE WOMEN OF WHITE AND WILLIAMS

We asked women lawyers to share significant moments in their careers and advice for young women lawyers.

Who Helped You the Most on Your Career Path?



Fabianna Pergolizzi, Associate, Subrogation

My father helped me the most on my career path. My father has instilled in me the passion of hard work and determination at a very young age. Throughout my entire life I have been fortunate to have a father who strongly believes in and encourages female empowerment. My ambitions have been guided through his strength that he has given to me as a foundation.

[Read more responses.](#)

Tell Us About a Significant Moment in Your Career.



Patti Santelle, Managing Partner

A significant moment in my career was being elected the Chair of White and Williams. It was a challenging time for the firm and for me personally because the former Chair, who was my mentor and long-time partner and closest friend at the firm, had died suddenly – but it was significant to have the support of the Executive Committee, as well as the partners and so many other folks around the firm, the clients and the legal community.

[Read more responses.](#)

What Has Been the Greatest Achievement in Your Legal Career Thus Far?



Debbie Sandler, Partner, Labor and Employment

Rather than one incident, I think my "greatest achievement" has been, collectively, the times I have been able to help a client out of a potentially disastrous situation so that they are able to focus on their business. This is especially true when it is a small or family-owned company.

[Read more responses.](#)

Did You Work in a Different Field Before Your Legal Career? If so, How Did That Experience Help Shape You as a Lawyer?



Katrina Gibson, Associate, Insurance Coverage and Bad Faith

I was a psychology major in undergrad and I worked several years after college completing drug treatment research because I wanted to apply for a clinical psychology graduate program. My education in that field has been surprisingly helpful in my practice as a lawyer because it has provided me with background knowledge that is often relevant to my cases. Most recently, it helped me win summary judgment on a novel legal issue. I successfully argued that the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (LAD) was not intended to apply to child sex abuse. My psychology

background was an integral part of that win because it helped me to effectively articulate why sexual abuse is different than sexual harassment.

What is the Best Piece of Advice That You Have Received?



Melissa Davis, Counsel, General Commercial Litigation

No one cares more about your career than you do. I've taken this to mean you need to speak up for yourself and do all you can to be sure your career is what you dream it to be.



Phyllis Ingram, Associate, Financial Lines

Don't worry that you won't get all the work done on your desk; worry when you don't have any work on your desk.

[Read more responses.](#)

Who Is The Most Influential Woman You know? How Does She Inspire You?



Franca Tavella, Associate, Tax and Estates

The most influential woman that I know is my maternal grandmother who passed away last April. She was married at the age of 16 and as a result, never finished high school. However, my grandmother was an ambitious woman and never let her lack of formal education stand in her way. After many years in Philadelphia where she raised three daughters, she moved to Atlantic City to take advantage of the rising casino industry. She started out as a bus-greeter for one of the casinos but eventually worked her way up to Vice President of Sales and Marketing. This career was not common for women at the time. She taught herself how to play golf so she could keep up with her male colleagues and clients, literally traveled the world for both work and pleasure, and was very involved in her community. When she retired, she started taking classes at the local community college. Her determination and love of life inspires me every day. It's funny because she always wanted to be an attorney and the Monday after she passed away, is the day I received my offer from White and Williams.

[Read more responses.](#)

Who Are Your Mentors and How Do Those Relationships Shape Your Career?



Nancy Sabol Frantz, Co-Chair, Real Estate and Finance

Since the beginning of my career, I have tried to model myself after a true trail blazer, Antoinette Stone. Although not an "official" mentor, she advised me on how she was able to be both a successful first-chair, full-time litigator respected by her clients and peers as well as an attentive and involved mother. She encouraged not only me, but many of my women colleagues to assert ourselves in our own unique way and to remain true to ourselves.

[Read more responses.](#)

How Do You Mentor Others or Help Women Advance in Your Workplace and the Legal Profession?



Meryl Breeden, Associate, Financial Lines

I think it is important to remember that each person coming into the profession after you is going through the same nerve wracking moments you just went through and probably feels like they need guidance. I have tried to meet with law students or younger colleagues to talk about those moments of transitions because I was so appreciative of the people ahead of me who took the time to do the same for me.



Jenifer Scarcella, Associate, Insurance Coverage and Bad Faith

I think the best thing women can do for other women, or anyone, in the workplace is to recognize and respond to others' ideas and give credit where it is due.

[Read more responses.](#)

What Advice Do You Offer Young Women Lawyers?

Patti Santelle, Managing Partner



I would tell a young woman attorney the same thing I would tell a young male attorney, which are the same traits that I attribute to my own success: Work hard to develop strong, important client relationships; work hard to gain the respect of colleagues; and always be prepared and responsive. Some advice specifically for women attorneys is to not ever change your personality. Don't feel that you have to be something different to succeed. I generally have a smile on my face, and maintain as positive an attitude as possible in the office — when I was an associate at another firm, a partner went to the trouble of submitting a written evaluation form on me solely for the purpose of saying that he/she appreciated that I always had a smile on my face. There is nothing wrong with being friendly as well as feminine and no need to act like someone you are not in order to succeed.



Shannon Warren, Associate, Subrogation

Take your time to figure out if being a lawyer is right for you. I took five years off between my undergraduate studies and law school to figure out if I was meant to be a lawyer. I invited almost every lawyer I knew out to coffee to find out what they did and if they liked practicing law. I worked in a district attorney's office, for a non-profit, and in a couple of law firms as a paralegal to figure out what I liked and disliked. Although you may not need five years to figure out if a legal career is right for you, I do recommend committing some serious time and effort to making sure that you indeed want to be a lawyer and what practice areas interest you, so that you can be more focused once you become a lawyer.

Read more responses.

If You Could Go Back and Give Your 16 Year Old Self Advice, What Would You Tell Her?



Lori Smith, Chair, Business Department

Don't be afraid of failure or making mistakes. We are all constantly learning new things and may be second-guessed or challenged on advice that we give. In the legal profession there isn't always a black or white answer and we may be dealing with issues of first impression where we have to be creative and thoughtful. But clients don't come to us for the easy stuff, they come to us to help with complex tasks. You should not be intimidated by the fact that you may not know all the answers or haven't done something before. You cannot advance in your career without taking chances and stretching beyond your comfort zone. Most successful people are the ones that aren't afraid to go outside the box, accept new challenges and are constantly learning from the team around them.

What Woman Has Inspired You?



Alison Russell, Associate, Healthcare

My mom has inspired me to never set a ceiling for myself in any aspect of my life. She has taught me how to speak my mind and be confident in my beliefs. She has instilled in me a fierce independence. She has encouraged me to never settle. When I was younger my teachers would tell my mom I was bossy. She told them I was a leader. Her confidence and unconditional support has helped me become the woman that I am today.



Amy Vulpio, Partner, Financial Restructuring and Bankruptcy

I had the privilege to hear US Senator Tammy Duckworth speak about her very inspiring experiences as a woman in the military and in Congress. A combat veteran and double amputee, Ms. Duckworth overcame her injuries to advocate for others – first in the House and now in the Senate – with incredible energy and empathy. She is truly an American hero.

Read more responses.

Why Did You Become a Lawyer?



Shannon Warren, Associate, Subrogation

I actually had no intention of becoming a lawyer until after college. I ended up getting a temporary position with the Oregon State Legislature Counsel right after graduation and quickly became captivated by the law. I decided I wanted to be a part of a field that has the ability to effectuate change and promote accountability and justice. Being a subrogation lawyer definitely fulfills those goals.



Katrina Gibson, Associate, Insurance Coverage and Bad Faith

I wanted a career that would challenge me, make me think, enable me to use my skill set, and make me proud. I also was a competitive athlete growing up, which really defined and shaped my character—I loved the sportsmanship, the team mentality, and I love to work hard and win! Being a lawyer is the closest thing I've been able to find in the professional world to emulating those aspects of competitive sports.

Tell Us About a Significant Moment That Helped Shape Your Career.



Franca Tavella, Associate, Tax and Estates

I don't think there is one moment that helped shape my career, but a collection of moments. After college, I worked for three years before going back to law school. During those years, I worked two very different organizations – the Phillies and a wealth management firm within a prominent bank - and met a variety of people. Ultimately, it was my experience at the wealth management firm that prompted me to apply to law school and pursue a career as a Trust & Estates attorney.

Read more responses.

Do You Have a Favorite Book That You Recommend Women in Law or Business Read?



Nancy Conrad, Chair, Labor and Employment

Notorious RBG: The Life and Times of Ruth Bader Ginsburg by Irin Carmon & Shana Knizhnik - wonderful, fun, inspiring book - it provides great insight into the personal and professional achievements of Justice Ginsburg. In the words of RBG – “So it was that ten years of my life that I devoted to litigating cases about – I don't say women's rights – I say the constitutional principle of the equal citizenship stature of men and women.” I am currently reading My Own Words by Ruth Bader Ginsburg. It is a fascinating read that includes the Justice's writings.

PRESERVING A LEGACY

White and Williams' Women's Initiative celebrates an integral part of our firm's history while serving as a foundation for nurturing the careers of our women lawyers. Our story begins with Virginia “Ginny” Barton Wallace. She earned her undergraduate degree from Wellesley College and then took an internship position at the *Saturday Evening Post* in Philadelphia. During World War II, Ginny rose to the rank of 1st Lieutenant, while serving with the Women's Army Air Corps. She attended the University of Pennsylvania Law School and earned her law degree in 1950. After graduation, Ginny joined White and Williams, and in 1961, went on to become the first woman partner at the firm and one of the first in the City of Philadelphia.

As a tribute to Ginny's legacy, our Women's Initiative serves as a critical component of our firm's retention, recruitment and business development efforts. The programs found within our Women's Initiative aim to create and maintain a dynamic work environment that fosters the advancement and success of the women within the firm. One of those programs is our Virginia Barton Wallace Award breakfast, an event that honors a woman in business who, like Ginny, has used her leadership and passion to inspire other women to succeed.

COMMITMENT TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Additionally, through professional and personal cultivation and development, our women lawyers are wired into the business community. Our women lawyers host, and speak at, educational and networking events that touch on a variety of topics including work/life balance, opportunities for career development and advancement and legal issues pertaining to business owners including tax and intellectual property.

Our women lawyers hold leadership positions and are active members of internal and external organizations including:

- Athena *PowerLink*
- Community Advisory Board of the CancerCare Community of Greater Lehigh Valley
- Lehigh Valley Women's 5K Classic
- Members of key firm management
- National Association of Female Executives
- National Association of Women Business Leaders (NAWBO)
- Practice leaders
- Professional Women's Roundtable
- Women's Business Council of the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce
- Women's World Banking

Our firm and our lawyers have been recognized for the Women's Initiative program. Some of those honors include:

- The firm was recognized by the Pennsylvania Bar Association's Commission on Women in the Profession
- Partner Patti Santelle received the Scarlet Oak Meritorious Service Award by Rutgers University for her contributions as an alumni leader and student mentor at the Rutgers-Camden School of Law
- Partner Gale White has been named among the Top 50 Women Lawyers in Pennsylvania by *Law and Politics* magazine
- Partner Nancy Conrad was the recipient of the "Take the Lead" award from the Girl Scouts and the "Athena Award" from the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce