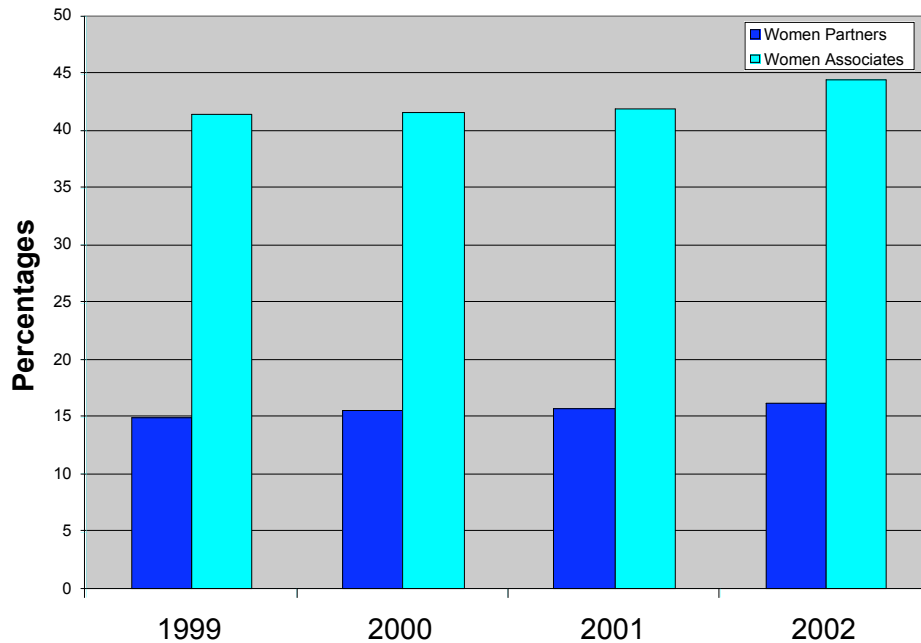


Owning the Agenda for Change
By Jane DiRenzo Pigott

Advancement of women into leadership positions at law firms has stalled. Yet, the pipeline has been and remains full.

Women in Law Firms (National Average)



Source: NALP Data for 1999-2002.

If these numbers are to see increases, women attorneys must take ownership of creating the change. Where do we start? What follows are ten activities any woman attorney can incorporate into her daily life as a way to become a positive part of the agenda for change.

1. **Create and Maintain Healthy Mentor Relationships.** The mentee bears the responsibility to identify areas where mentoring would be helpful, identify viable mentors and create and maintain healthy mentor relationships. Be respectful of your mentor's time and energy. Seek to add value as well as ask for assistance. On the flipside, actively look for ways to be a role model and a mentor to others.
2. **Create and Maintain Diverse Networks.** Women commonly make the mistake of equating networks with friends. While your friends are one of your networks, you need to have diverse networks. You do not need to like all of the people in your network. They should not all look like you or think like you.
3. **Develop a Style That Others Are Comfortable With.** It is NOT the responsibility of others in your organization to get comfortable with you.

Instead, you are responsible for developing a personal style that puts others at ease. This style has many components. Examine how you dress. Examine your communication style. Examine your meeting behavior. Seriously consider participating in activities that the senior people find important, like golf. .

4. **Ask, Ask and Ask Again.** Sitting in your office doing excellent work is NOT the key to success. In order to be successful, you need high visibility assignments for important clients with important partners. How do you get them? Ask the right people in a professional manner. Asking once may not be enough. Getting a negative response does not mean “no” forever. You must continue to ask for what you need and want, and be ready to say “yes” when you get an affirmative response.
5. **Effectively Self-Promote.** No one who matters will know what you are accomplishing unless you tell them. Learn to keep the right people informed. In addition, take the opportunity to announce your expectations to the people who can make them happen.
6. **Be a Team Player.** Liking everyone you work with is not necessary. You must, however, be able to personally contribute to the team efforts and be an effective team member regardless of your personal view of other team members. It is never acceptable to impact the team effort detrimentally by “stealing credit” or “trashing” team members.
7. **Take the Opportunities Offered To You.** Take the initiative to create opportunities or find out about opportunities of interest. Be prepared to take risks. Believe that you have the skills, competence and networks to take advantage of the opportunity.
8. **Seek Professional Development Training.** Specifically seek out professional development opportunities. Remember to look outside of your organization. You are more likely to find leadership, project management, communication and networking opportunities earlier in your career in civic and professional groups.
9. **Seek Reasonable Balance.** Every woman has multiple priorities, all of which are not only important, but demanding. Multi-tasking is a common way women address this issue. When stress levels rise above acceptable limits, consider whether any of the tasks can be outsourced or delegated. .
10. **Be Generous.** A powerful force would be created if each of us actively helped each other. Let’s only speak positively about each other. Let’s provide “third party” endorsements for each other. Let’s broadly share opportunities.

Women attorneys need to take ownership of creating positive movement on the percent of women in leadership positions in the law firms. Women can “own” the agenda for this change by: (1) utilizing the strategies and tactics necessary to be successful within our organizations and (2) reaching out and helping those women beneath, beside and above us on a daily basis.