



## Women Owned Law Member Spotlight Questionnaire

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**Tell us about your firm including: history, specialization, and years in business.**

I have been addressing the relationship between employers and employees for 25 years. While I've represented clients on the plaintiff's side, defense side, I've also worked in human resources. I started my firm in 2005 as an employment law boutique. While my clients come from a broad range of businesses, I developed the regulatory framework to create a sub-specialty at the intersection of employment and health care. I work primarily with employers in health care and related industries.

**What's an interesting fact about you or your firm most people don't know?**

When I was growing up, I wanted to be the next Francine Patterson, the woman who taught sign language to the late Koko the gorilla. I have a fascination with what makes people tick, and why they behave the way they do. To get into the head of a gorilla felt like an opportunity to better understand human behavior. While I am now glad I didn't pursue that career and understand that keeping a gorilla in captivity is not a good idea, I now focus my fascination with human behavior on helping employers with their employees.

**What's a favorite moment of your career so far?**

Because I love my work, there are great moments all of the time. It's so satisfying when I find a win-win for employer and employee, or a way out of a difficult situation. My clients often express their appreciation for my insights, responsiveness and dependability. There is no drug that could possibly give me that kind of pleasure.

**What challenge are you most proud of overcoming?**

I came out as a lesbian just before I started law school. During law school, I spent a lot of time with a gay lawyers group in DC, and discovered that no one felt that it was safe to be "out" at a big firm, and only a handful of firms were known as safe spaces. I worried that I wouldn't be able to support myself, pay off my student loans or grow a career in private practice. I knew I would suffocate if I had to keep to myself to avoid questions at work about my personal life, or make up stories about my activities outside of work. I am proud that I found a career in private practice while staying true to myself. I am incredibly happy that young gay lawyers don't face the same homophobia in large firms today.

**Tell us about your morning ritual.**

I walk Ella, my Labrador Retriever, first thing every morning. I start out bleary-eyed, but by the end of the walk, I am awake and ready to start my day. Ella gives me so many gifts, and her need for exercise is just one of them.

**What advice would you offer new business owners?**

Before starting out, think about where you would like to be in 1 year, 5 years and 10 years. Create a plan to reach these milestones, stick to it, and remember to revisit the plan every year. You will change, and your plan should change with you.

**What do you wish you had known before starting your own business?**

A law firm is more than just the practice of law; it's a business. I was not well prepared to deal with the non-legal aspects of law firm ownership. If I could do it over again, I would still have started my firm, but would have done more homework, so I could have been better prepared to become a businessperson.

**How can you help other WOL members improve their business?**

I have been lucky enough to build relationships with more experienced lawyers throughout my career. They have been generous with their time, and been incredibly helpful in starting and building relationships with clients and other lawyers. I see it as my obligation and privilege to continue to pay it forward to others. I would love to hear from other WOL members.

**How has your WOL membership been of value to you and your career?**

I have enjoyed getting to know the other WOL members. Serving on the Board and the Executive Committee has given me the chance to get to know others more closely. These roles within WOL have also given me a direct route to lawyers in the community who I have long admired and respected. I value these relationships, and look forward to deepening them.

**Guilty Pleasure: What can you not live without?**

Dark chocolate. The high cocoa content, bougie kind. I keep some in my desk and have trouble getting through the day without at least one square.

**Nominate Someone!**

WOL turns the spotlight on members to highlight how they are making a difference and how they have benefited from WOL membership.

It offers an opportunity for you to share your story with colleagues, inspire future entrepreneurs, and strengthen awareness of the profession and association. Member Spotlight appears regularly on <https://www.womenownedlaw.org/>. To nominate another member email: [CoachDena@gmail.com](mailto:CoachDena@gmail.com)