

Are Law Firms Striving for Gender Equality? If So, Which Ones?



***Summary:** A great deal of research and studies have been done to determine gender equality in law firms but what really makes a law firm gender equal?*

Gender equality has taken a front seat in 2017. The legal industry has typically seen fewer women than men, especially in the higher ranks as women seem to drop off more than men for various reasons. In the article [“Where Do Law Firms Stand When It Comes to Gender Equality?”](#), we learn more about the state of law firms in their fight to treat women equally.

Looking at the numbers of law school graduates, women make up about half but start to decline in numbers after that with roughly 40 percent of first-year associates being women. With a glaringly obvious discrepancy between the number of women law school graduates and women in the higher rankings of law firms, law firms are forced to find a way to address the problem.

Forbes recently examined female equity partnerships numbers in their “20 Great Law Firms for Women” list. Of that list, a San Francisco firm was on top with an average of 37 percent female equity partners. When keeping in mind the national average of 18 percent, this is quite a difference.

Here is some of list of law firms that beat the national average: Hanson Bridgett 37 percent, Fredrikson & Byron 35 percent, Littler 30 percent, Holland & Hart 27 percent, Sidley Austin 27 percent, Gray Plant Mooty 26 percent, Wilmer Hale 25 percent, Schiff Hardin 24 percent, Davis Wright Tremaine 24 percent, Ice Miller 22 percent, and Reed Smith 22 percent.

When trying to determine how hard a firm actively works to sustain a gender-equal environment, looking at pure equity partnerships numbers does not paint the full picture. Bloomberg Big Law Business tackled this issue by looking at partnership announcements of AmLaw 100 firms in 2016 to see how many involved women. They determined that 37 percent of the attorneys that made partner in AmLaw 100 firms were women. A number of other studies have been done to find which law firms are promoting women and which are not.

A number that has to be considered when determining how gender equal a law firm is being is the total number of attorney data. Law360 made their own list of “100 Best U.S. Law Firms for Women.” This list compares the percentage of women from the total number of attorneys to the number of female equity and nonequity partners. The article states, “For the firms that nabbed spots on the list, the number of women at all levels of the firm shows that firm leaders are finding some new ways to open doors and increase diversity.”

The things that law firm leaders are doing to make their firms more gender equal is to make them more female-friendly. This includes offering flextime, reduced hours, generous parental leave, job sharing, annualized hours, child care, sponsorship programs, networking groups and events, and women-focused business development initiatives. Firms that excelled in developing this kind of environment included Arnold & Porter, Kay Scholer, and Baker & McKenzie. Some of the perks at Arnold & Porter include the “development of female lawyers with myriad training initiatives, flexible schedules and at least 18 fully paid weeks of birth or adoption leave (plus \$10,000 in adoption aid).”

While a number of top law firms are making great strides toward fostering gender equal law firms, there are still a large number that are not even registering an attempt towards gender equality.

Do you think gender equality is hard to achieve with fairness or will someone always feel short-changed? Tell us in the comments below.

To learn more about gender equality, read these articles:

- [Female BigLaw Partners Fighting Gender Pay Inequality with Lawsuits](#)
- [Joint Study Finds Racial and Gender Inequality Still Present in Legal Industry](#)
- [Chief Legal Officers Continue to Experience Gender Pay Gap](#)