



## FOCUS ON



Angela Scafuri is a commercial litigation associate at Bressler, Amery & Ross, P.C. A 2000 graduate of Seton Hall University School of Law, she earned her B.A. in English Literature and Spanish from Colgate University. Her insurance practice spans a broad spectrum of complex matters for both insurers and policyholders with a focus on the defense of insurance companies in complex premium, coverage and bad faith actions. She has argued cases at both the trial and appellate levels, and has successfully defended clients in federal courts throughout the country. Ms. Scafuri is a member of the ABA, the NJSBA, the Association of the Federal Bar of the State of New Jersey and the New Jersey Women Lawyers Association. Ms. Scafuri's *pro bono* legal work includes her volunteer work for the New Jersey Battered Women's Legal Advocacy Project. Contact: [Angela Scafuri](#)

### **An Interview With Angela Scafuri**

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#### **TCL What is your practice area? How long have you been practicing?**

My practice area is commercial litigation. I have been practicing since September 2000.

#### **TCL What do women wish they'd learned in law school that wasn't covered?**

Everything—how to draft a pleading, effectively manage time, maximize productivity, and have a life outside of the office!

#### **TCL Do you think women are better suited for any particular kinds of legal practice as opposed to others?**

No. I believe women are best suited to practice the type of law they enjoy in an atmosphere in which they enjoy it whether it be private practice, in-house counsel or the government. I do believe, however, that a woman may face more difficulties as a trial attorney because of the various deadlines and court calendars. Judges can be inflexible. A man will likely never face the issue of being 8 months pregnant and attempting to reschedule a trial calendar before he goes into labor.

#### **TCL How can a woman best evaluate a law firm she is considering working for?**

First, make sure you know the basics: inquire into billable hours, firm structure, path to partnership, whether part time partnership is a possibility, whether the firm provides a mentoring program for new associates (including laterals), family leave and maternity policies. Next, try to get a feel for the environment. Is there a large attrition rate? If so, why? Try and speak to at least one or two women who are partners or would be lateral to you and ask about their experience.

**TCL Do you perceive any differences in the ways in which women and men lawyers are evaluated by their firms?**

From my personal experience, I have not been evaluated differently from the men at my firm. I do think that I am lucky in that respect because, unfortunately, I have heard stories from friends and colleagues who do experience disparate treatment. Most significantly, I have heard of law firms that will treat newly married female associates or pregnant female associates differently because there is an unspoken expectation that these women will not be able to keep up with the work load or want to work part-time. I have heard of situations in which young associates or junior partners who have families are given less complex material altogether. In addition, I have heard of law firms that will include men in certain marketing opportunities but not afford women in the firm these same marketing opportunities.

**TCL What practice areas, if any, do you think suffer if managed by an attorney working reduced hours? Why do you think that?**

The trial bar does not slow down for any attorney, be it a man or woman. So I believe it would be extremely challenging to be a part-time litigator, regardless of gender.

**TCL There is a common perception that women lawyers want to work fewer hours to play a more integral role in their family life or community or to be a more balanced person. Please explain how you agree or disagree with that perception**

I disagree with that perception. While it is true that some women do, in fact, choose to work part-time or fewer hours because they have made a conscious decision that they want to be able to direct more of their energies to their family and/or the community, one woman's decision should not become a generalization for all women in the profession.

**TCL What needs to happen to make the "mommy track" a desirable alternative for some women?**

The one major concern women express over being "mommy tracked" is the negative stigma that is attached to women who take advantage of what should be a viable and positive option to women with families. Often times, women who are "mommy tracked" are not provided with the same type of complex matters they once worked on or could work on, because the partners or the firm do not believe they are capable of handling the workload. Instantly, these women are at a disadvantage if they would like to pursue partnership.

**TCL Women have constituted 40% of law school graduates since the mid 1980s but still compose only about 17% of law firm partners. Imagine that a creature from another planet who has no experience with the legal profession or with gender differences asks you why there are so few women at the top tiers of their firms. How would you answer?**

I would explain to our alien friend that historically, women in our society were viewed as the mothers and care-takers of the family, while men were viewed as the providers for the family unit. While traditional views of men and women have changed over the last several decades, and, indeed, continue to change, many women take advantage of the opportunity to attend law school, but, often times, either leave the profession early on to dedicate themselves to their family, or take positions in government or serve as in-house counsel in the business world so that they have more control over their schedules. Many women leave the profession because they find other career paths that allow more control and flexibility to better maintain the work/family balance.

**TCL What do firms need to do to keep top women lawyers?**

Flexibility is key. The traditional view of attorneys working in the office from 8-8 from Monday through Friday is not workable for many women who choose to raise families and pursue partnership. Technology has afforded us the opportunity to work remotely, to be accessible by Blackberry or cell phone. Law firms need to embrace the idea that women can work just as effectively from their chairs in the office as from the schoolyard or doctor's office.

**TCL What is the most egregious case of discrimination you have encountered? How did you handle it then and how would you handle it now?**

Fortunately, I have not been exposed to an egregious case of discrimination.

**TCL Think of an example of a woman attorney you know who is a strong and powerful, and also warm and compassionate. Please tell us about her**

I am blessed to know so many extraordinary women that it is difficult to choose just one. What they all share in common, however, is a love of life as well as for the profession. On a daily basis, they strive to achieve excellence at the office; at the same time, they are incredibly committed and dedicated to their families. And, of course, they all struggle with the concept of sacrifice as they juggle multiple balls in the air in order to try and have it all.

**TCL What are the benefits for women lawyers to have women mentors and role models? What are the drawbacks?**

There are so many benefits to have women mentors in the profession. I see many young associates who are overwhelmed because they feel as if they cannot be completely dedicated to their jobs without sacrificing something at home, or vice versa. Having exposure to a woman mentor who understands those feelings, and can share experiences and offer advice is absolutely critical to the development of any young associate.

**TCL What is the best way for women to respond to discrimination from judges, opposing attorneys, or clients?**

There is no good way to respond to discrimination because it shouldn't happen to begin with. Always stay professional, but certainly address it up front if you experience it from a client or opposing counsel. With the Court, it can become a much more frustrating experience, because a judge can have an instrumental impact on your client's lawsuit. Always maintain your dignity and always stay true to yourself. Judges should not get away with discrimination because an attorney fears her addressing the issue with the Court will have a negative impact on the case. Judges, if anything, should be held to a higher standard to serve as role models for the community at large.