

A different view from the corner office

*Female managing partners discuss their paths to the top
– and how other women can join them*

By Anamika Roy

ARoy@TheDailyRecord.com

Just 23 percent of law firm partners nationally are women and only 19 percent are equity partners – despite women making up half of law school attendees. And of the 42 largest law firms in Maryland that responded to The Daily Record's Largest Law Firms survey, only four have a woman as managing partner or comparable leadership role. We spoke to those four women about the gender gap as well as their journey to leadership positions and how other women can join them.

The four women are:

■ Debra Cruz, managing principal at Levin & Gann P.A. in Towson, assumed the role in January after 18 years at the firm.

■ Nancy Greene, chairman of Miles & Stockbridge PC in Baltimore, was named to the firm's leadership in February and has been there for 20 years.

■ Sharon Krevor-Weisbaum, managing partner at Brown, Goldstein & Levy LLP in Baltimore, started at the firm as a law clerk in 1986. She recalls working in founder Chris Brown's office at a little round wooden table. After law school and working in other legal positions, Krevor-Weisbaum returned to Brown Goldstein in 2000 and became managing partner in January 2016.

■ Linda Woolf, managing partner at Goodell, DeVries, Leech & Dann LLP has been with the Baltimore-based firm since its founding in 1988, when she joined as a third-year associate. She became a partner in 1993 and has been managing partner for 13 years.

Some answers have been edited and condensed for clarity.

Why did you want to become an attorney?

Sharon Krevor-Weisbaum: "Did I or didn't I want to be an attorney?" is the question. Down deep, the answer must have been that I did, although I deferred entry for several years toying between being a social worker or a teacher. My father, who was a wonderful and determined lawyer, wanted me to go into the law so that I could be independent and do something that women, at least of his generation, had not. I feel as though I combined my passion for people, children, and relationships with the advocacy and analytic tools that the law provides.

Nancy Greene: Law school brought together my interests. Growing up, I loved history and politics and was fascinated by legal cases, particularly those that played a role in shaping the United States. I also developed an interest in the environment as an undergrad at Washington College, a grad student at St. John's College and law student at the University of Maryland.

Originally, I thought I would have a career working for a nonprofit focused on environmental issues. However, when I was finishing a clerkship in Anne Arundel County Circuit Court, I was offered an opportunity to work at Miles & Stockbridge in the area of real estate. The decision to accept the position opened the door to many wonderful opportunities. I am still with the firm and have a practice that I love.

Linda Woolf: I was not one of those persons who always knew they wanted to be an attorney or who had attorneys in the family. But, in my undergraduate studies, I realized that the courses I excelled in involved logic, technical writing, speech and debate and finally, business law. When one of my professors offered me a job at a large Baltimore law firm, I immediately made up my mind to finish my undergraduate work as quickly as possible so I could get to law school.

Debra Cruz: There was no "noble" reason. I had a bachelor's in psychology and knew I needed a higher degree to be self-supporting. Law school offered a shorter path and, as my mom pointed out, I loved to argue, so becoming an attorney was a natural choice.



From left: Debra Cruz, managing principal at Levin & Gann P.A. in Towson; Sharon Krevor-Weisbaum, managing partner at Brown, Goldstein & Levy LLP in Baltimore; Nancy Green, chairman of Miles & Stockbridge PC in Baltimore; and Linda Woolf, managing partner at Goodell, DeVries, Leech & Dann LLP in Baltimore. (Maximilian Franz/The Daily Record)

What have been the keys to your career success?

NG: I have had some amazing mentors—lawyers (men and women) who trained me to be a good lawyer and two fabulous legal By Anamika Roy

ARoy@TheDailyRecord.com

Just 23 percent of law firm partners nationally are women and only 19 percent are equity partners – despite women making up half of law school attendees. And of the 42 largest law firms in Maryland that responded to The Daily Record's Largest Law Firms survey, only four have a woman as managing partner or comparable leadership role. We spoke to those four women about the gender gap as well as their journey to leadership positions and how other women can join them.

The four women are:

■ Debra Cruz, managing principal at Levin & Gann P.A. in Towson, assumed the role in January after 18 years at the firm.

■ Nancy Greene, chairman of Miles & Stockbridge PC in Baltimore, was named to the firm's leadership in February and has been there for 20 years.

■ Sharon Krevor-Weisbaum, managing partner at Brown,

Goldstein & Levy LLP in Baltimore, started at the firm as a law clerk in 1986. She recalls working in founder Chris Brown's office at a little round wooden table. After law school and working in other legal positions, Krevor-Weisbaum returned to Brown Goldstein in 2000 and became managing partner in January 2016.

■ Linda Woolf, managing partner at Goodell, DeVries, Leech & Dann LLP has been with the Baltimore-based firm since its founding in 1988, when she joined as a third-year associate. She became a partner in 1993 and has been managing partner for 13 years.

Some answers have been edited and condensed for clarity.

Why did you want to become an attorney?

Sharon Krevor-Weisbaum: "Did I or didn't I want to be an attorney?" is the question. Down deep, the answer must have been that I did, although I deferred entry for several years toying between being a social worker or a teacher. My father, who was a wonderful and determined lawyer, wanted me to go into the law so that I could be independent and do something that women, at least of his generation, had not. I feel as though I combined my passion for people, children, and relationships



"I am a big fan of mentors. Women and minorities need peer role models and there are far too few. Thankfully, with the advent of more woman judges and women CEOs that is slowly changing."

— Debra Cruz, managing principal,
Levin & Gann P.A.



“When evaluating leadership positions, including practice group leaders and board positions, we make sure to build diverse teams. Seven of our eight largest practice groups are co-led by women. They are in leadership positions not because they are women, but because they are great lawyers for the roles.”

— Nancy Greene, chairman,
Miles & Stockbridge PC

with the advocacy and analytic tools that the law provides.

Nancy Greene: Law school brought together my interests. Growing up, I loved history and politics and was fascinated by legal cases, particularly those that played a role in shaping the United States. I also developed an interest in the environment as an undergrad at Washington College, a grad student at St. John’s College and law student at the University of Maryland.

Originally, I thought I would have a career working for a nonprofit focused on environmental issues. However, when I was finishing a clerkship in Anne Arundel County Circuit Court, I was offered an opportunity to work at Miles & Stockbridge in the area of real estate. The decision to accept the position opened the door to many wonderful opportunities. I am still with the firm and have a practice that I love.

Linda Woolf: I was not one of those persons who always knew they wanted to be an attorney or who had attorneys in the family. But, in my undergraduate studies, I realized that the courses I excelled in involved logic, technical writing, speech and debate and finally, business law. When one of my professors offered me a job at a large Baltimore law firm, I immediately made up my mind to finish my undergraduate work as quickly as possible so I could get to law school.

Debra Cruz: There was no “noble” reason. I had a bachelor’s in psychology and knew I needed a higher degree to be self-supporting. Law school offered a shorter path and, as my mom pointed out, I loved to argue, so becoming an attorney was a natural choice.

What have been the keys to your career success?

NG: I have had some amazing mentors—lawyers (men and women) who trained me to be a good lawyer and two fabulous legal assistants who helped “raise me” in Miles & Stockbridge. They taught me how to navigate the firm and work well with different lawyers early in my career and to recognize the importance of all individuals no matter what roles they fill.

I also have fabulous clients, including some I have worked with my entire career. They are my mentors and my friends. I am truly grateful for these relationships and my incredibly supportive husband and children.

Later in my career, the Greater Baltimore Committee’s LEADERship Program was eye-opening for me. I grew and matured in ways I didn’t expect. Most importantly, I learned the importance of listening, how to be present in the moment and how to listen for both what is said and what is not said.

SKW: Doing work that I have a passion for and finding the ability to balance work with the joys that come from my family, friends, and community involvement.

LW: First, very good mentors, most of them accomplished trial lawyers with whom I have worked over the years. Second, being willing to take on matters outside my comfort zone, eventually developing my own practice. Third, taking an active part in professional organizations where I found opportunities to speak, publish and develop a reputation for expertise in various subject matters. And, perhaps most importantly, being part of a firm where women are given every opportunity to become part of the leadership.

DC: A sense of humor and determination to succeed.

What is the greatest challenge you have faced as managing



“(Our) firm encourages women to take on leadership roles in cases, with clients, on firm committees, and within practice groups. Our young women attorneys are given significant responsibilities in our matters which allow them to gain valuable experience and confidence.”

— Linda Woolf, managing partner, Goodell,
DeVries, Leech & Dann LLP

partner?

NG: Lateral movement, which is both a challenge and an opportunity. There is a lot of movement in the legal industry right now. Firms are looking at other firms’ lawyers, and we’re looking at theirs. Just last month, we announced departures in Baltimore and also welcomed a group of nine affordable housing and tax credit lawyers from a global firm to our D.C. office.

LW: Keeping a mid-size firm with both a strong local and national practice successful and relevant in a time when there is so much consolidation.

SKW: Figuring out how to see the firm from the perspective of every employee. Doing this has created wonderful opportunities to move the firm to a place where we all want to be.

DC: Well, it is probably too soon to say that. I am still in the learning curve, but I can foresee that figuring out where to take us and how to get us there will be the challenge. Our firm is now 103 years old. I want to do what I can to strengthen the chance we will last another 103 years.

What does your firm do to support women attorneys and ensure they can advance at the firm?

NG: Inclusion doesn’t stop at recruiting. Miles & Stockbridge assists all lawyers in their professional and leadership development. More than 15 years ago, a group of women lawyers created the Women’s Network to promote leadership development and mentoring among our women lawyers. Today the group hosts monthly “Lunch and learn” sessions for our women lawyers (at all career levels) and other firm leaders. We also bring together women clients and other professionals in the community for



We also have flexible work arrangements which have allowed our women attorneys to work non-traditional hours, from home or other remote locations. As a result, our firm has not experienced the high attrition rate among women which is prevalent across the profession.

DC: I would have to say that they make an effort to treat them the same as the men.

What can the legal profession do (or do better) to be more inclusive of women (and minorities)?

DC: I am a big fan of mentors. Women and minorities need peer role models and there are far too few. Thankfully, with the advent of more woman judges and women CEOs that is slowly changing. The legal profession needs to promote those opportunities and encourage women and minorities who have succeeded to participate in mentoring others.

NG: Three years ago, Miles & Stockbridge instituted our own version of the NFL’s “Rooney Rule.” We interview at least one woman, minority or LGBTQ lawyer for all lateral lawyer positions. Because of this policy, we have seen a significant increase in the number of women and other diverse candidates identified, interviewed and hired.

We work on a daily basis to elevate our diversity and inclusion efforts from initiatives to a way of life. For many firms and companies, this requires a cultural shift. Other ideas to consider:

■ Be thoughtful in supporting women clients. Invite them to join a panel discussion, help them join a group or board, and support their community endeavors.

■ Help those who have been successful to be good mentors to others.

■ Be inclusive in succession planning so lawyers with varied perspectives and backgrounds are leading firms down the road.

■ Keep talking about women’s issues in the profession so there is an ongoing dialogue about what is working and what is not.

■ Do not discount the value of men in the conversation. Men are great mentors, sponsors and cheerleaders. They are fathers, husbands and sons, and they bring a valuable perspective to the dialogue.

SKW: Diversity training is very important but also working

“I hope that my role has been a message to others that (Brown, Goldstein & Levy LLP’s) actions are consistent with its historic voice of equality. Women attorneys need and are entitled to strong mentorship and to enjoy equal opportunities in transition planning.”

— Sharon Krevor-Weisbaum, managing
partner, Brown, Goldstein & Levy LLP

educational, networking and social opportunities.

One of the network’s founders, Suzzanne Decker, was elected to our board of directors in February. With Suzzanne’s election, four of our nine board members are women.

When evaluating leadership positions, including practice group leaders and board positions, we make sure to build diverse teams. Seven of our eight largest practice groups are co-led by women. They are in leadership positions not because they are women, but because they are great lawyers for the roles.

SKW: Although our firm has more women attorneys than men, it remains very important for all of us to ensure that women have an equal opportunity to pave a path to leadership. I hope that my role has been a message to others that BGL’s actions are consistent with its historic voice of equality. Women attorneys need and are entitled to strong mentorship and to enjoy equal opportunities in transition planning.

to figure out what that really means in terms of implementation within a firm’s culture is critical for change to take place.

LW: Firm leadership must examine their leadership structure and, if it is not inclusive, ask why and take the necessary steps to make it so. It’s important to recognize the value of the differences among us, make a place at the table for those differences and be respectful of and sensitive to perspectives that aren’t our own.

On a practical level, that might mean appointing women to leadership positions with practice groups, offering flexible work schedules, or scheduling firm events so that they don’t interfere with family life or religious holidays.

What advice would give young women attorneys interested in having a leadership role in a law firm?

DC: Watch and learn from your male AND female colleagues. Develop your emotional IQ (learning to manage and harness the emotions of others in the room, as well as your own). Learn to pick your battles. Never, ever lose your sense of humor. Never, ever lose your sense of integrity.

NG: Start small. Show leadership in what you are already doing, whether it’s trial prep, a transaction or pro bono work. Volunteer when your firm asks for help. And don’t be afraid to share your ideas and have honest conversations.

As an associate and young mother, I helped the firm institute policies to support working parents at the firm. Pushing for a flexible and ever-evolving firm culture has remained a focus throughout my career. If you have an interest, find a sponsor in your firm—someone who already supports your work and who can help you navigate into a leadership role.

SKW: Leadership roles do not just happen. Young attorneys who want to become firm leaders should always be looking for those opportunities to connect with partners and others on not only case assignments but on working committees and ad hoc projects. Those in leadership do not forget team players and those who contribute ideas and energy to the life and growth of the firm.

LW: Take advantage of opportunities to become involved in activities within the firm. Be active within your practice group. Do not expect the more senior lawyers to be your backstop. Give them your best effort and work product and ask for feedback and guidance.

LW: First, our firm encourages women to take on leadership roles in cases, with clients, on firm committees and within practice groups. Our young women attorneys are given significant responsibilities in our matters which allows them to gain valuable experience and confidence.

We also recognize the importance of work-life balance. Our firm has a fully-paid, 12-week maternity leave policy with the ability to extend leave time on an individual basis.