Be Your Own Best Advocate: Workplace Advancement for Female Attorneys

Sponsored by the ABA Young Lawyers Division’s Women in the Profession Committee

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Speakers

Jessica Nguyen
PayScale, Inc.

Nancy S. Shilepsky
Sherin and Lodgen LLP
What do you do, and how did you get there?

- Built and manage the legal department at PayScale. First in-house attorney for PayScale.
- Collector and builder of skills, network, and experiences. Been practicing for about 13 years with a focus on technology companies.
- Worked at different technology companies at various stages of a company’s lifecycle.

Jessica Nguyen
PayScale, Inc.
What do you do, and how did you get there?

- Chair of law firm’s Employment Law Department
- Have been practicing employment law for 35 years
Career Hurdles

- Laid off from law firm in 2010
- Witnessed lack of correlation between impact/results and reward (e.g., pay raise or promotion)
- No career advancement transparency by some past managers

Jessica Nguyen
PayScale, Inc.
Career Hurdles

- Being given dead-end assignments
- Managing the expectation that even women litigators are supposed to be “nice”
- Learning to recognize the difference between constructive criticism and criticism intended to undermine
Pivotal professional development moments

- Laid off from a law firm in 2010 and landed at an early stage technology start-up shortly thereafter.
- Cultivated professional allies at Microsoft and PayScale.
- Embraced my “wins.”
Pivotal professional development moments

- Finding unofficial mentors early in my career
- Their sponsoring me within our field, e.g. within the Bar
- Working with them to develop my substantive skills

Nancy S. Shilepsky
Sherin and Lodgen LLP
What I wish I knew about professional development

Be authentic and self-aware. Ask yourself these questions regularly (answers may change as you evolve):

• **What** are skills I want to learn over the next couple of years, and what projects or experiences will help me obtain those skills?

• **Who** has a professional life that I admire?

• **Why** do I admire that professional life?
What I wish I knew about professional development

• Have something to offer
• Find people who want to help you and who you can help
• Put your energy into developing genuine relationships with those people

Nancy S. Shilepsky
Sherin and Lodgen LLP
Workplace advocacy

- Ask for feedback shortly right after a project
- Give positive feedback to others (within or outside of your organization)
- Tell your manager your goals and ask for guidance to reach your goals. Don’t assume your manager knows what your goals are, or is thinking about it.

Jessica Nguyen
PayScale, Inc.
Workplace advocacy

- Meaningful assignments that allow you to develop your skills
- Opportunities for networking and career advancement
- Compensation

Nancy S. Shilepsky
Sherin and Lodgen LLP
Professional development, and myths

- Set short-term and long-term goals for what professional skills, experiences, and network you’d like to build.
- **Myth (sometimes):** Your manager is your advocate and is actively thinking about your development, growth, and career.
- **Myth:** You will be rewarded for just working hard and doing good work.

Jessica Nguyen
PayScale, Inc.
Professional development, and myths

• Build your expertise, network, and brand
• Myth: Changing jobs too often will hurt your career
• Myth: All networking leads to business

Nancy S. Shilepsky
Sherin and Lodgen LLP
Challenges facing new attorneys and their solutions

- **Challenge:** Lack of experience
- **Solution:** Take risks if you can – optimize your career for learning and not for compensation, title, or prestige. Sometimes the path up is not a linear one.
Challenges facing new attorneys and their solutions

- Challenge: Competition
- Solution: Find what you are good at and stick with it
- Solution: Find people who believe in you and stick with them
- Solution: Find your market and work it

Nancy S. Shilepsky
Sherin and Lodgen LLP
Questions?