

PARTNERS IN EQUALITY

Women account for just 20 percent of partners at law firms nationwide Miller Nash’s promotion of seven women skews that ratio. Managing Partner Kieran Curley explains the firm’s efforts to promote gender equity.

Walk into a partner meeting at almost any law firm in the United States and you will be met by a room dominated by men.

Women represent about 20 percent of partners at law firms nationwide, despite the fact that 45 percent of law firm associates are women, according to the American Bar Association.

It’s a very different picture at Miller Nash. Of the Portland-based law firm’s 75 partners, 26 – nearly 35 percent – are women. That’s out of an associate pool that is 55 percent female.

Those percentages shifted considerably in mid-January, when Miller Nash elevated seven women to partner.

The all-female partner class wasn’t intentional, said Miller Nash Managing Partner Kieran Curley, but says a lot about the state of the legal industry.

Why do you think the percentage of female partners at firms nationwide is so low? I’m not sure why that is. I do know that as long as I’ve been here, that has been the case. We have been promoting diversity for a long time, and it’s an advantage to us if others aren’t doing that. Back in the 1980s, Chris Helmer, who is still with us, became the second woman partner at a major law firm in Portland, and we have a five-person executive committee that runs the firm and two of the five folks are women.



MILLER NASH
Naomi Haslitt, Mia Butzbaugh, Jeanne Sinnott, Stacey Martinson, Elizabeth Milesnick, Jenee Hilliard and Chandra Eidt make up the new seven-person, all-female class of new partners at Portland law firm Miller Nash LLP.

Why is diversity important? Our client base has become much more diverse, and it’s important that our firm reflect that. Many of our clients and in-house counsels are women who might have similar backgrounds and life situations that a number of our new partners have. Balancing families and work can help our partners relate. One partner, Elisa Dozono, for example, is very well connected in the business community, and I think she can connect well with other women.

Of course, in many families, achieving a work-life balance is as much an issue for men as women. Do you see that at Miller Nash? Yes. There is a cultural change. What’s helped, not just in law but in business at large, is technology. You can

now do a lot from home. We’re integrated on a network and can be working from anyplace, which has allowed people to have different schedules and more flexibility.

It seems like having a big pool of female partners would also help recruit young ambitious women to the firm. It does. Of this group of new partners, Mia Butzbaugh is a University of Michigan graduate and she went back there to do recruiting and has recruited at least one woman. And Naomi Haslitt is both on our diversity and hiring committees and she has helped recruit a number of women.

– Suzanne Stevens, @PDXBIZSuzanne

EQUITY METER

The top five Portland law firms on The List each surpass the 20 percent national average for female partners. Here’s how they compare to each other:

Female Male

