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S-E-A Being known for experience and expertise begins with seeking these qualities in the professionals you engage.

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Sharing Success: An Interview with Diane Fleming Averell



The following article is an interview with Diane Fleming Averell, Vice Chair of the DRI Women in the Law Committee, regarding insights related to her recent selection to serve on her firm's Management Committee and advice to other women attorneys who aspire to management positions in their firms or companies.

We congratulate Diane on her new role at Porzio, Bromberg & Newman, P.C. and thank her for sharing her success, talents and insights with others, especially with the members of the Women in the Law Committee!

1. Describe your new role at your law firm.

After serving 20 years as Porzio's Managing Principal, my friend and mentor Jeff Campbell stepped down and Porzio's principals unanimously selected another great friend and mentor Vito A. Gagliardi, Jr. as the firm's new Managing Principal. Along with this leadership change, a five-person Management Committee was formed to support Vito in his new role so that he could continue to practice law and serve clients. I was chosen to serve on this Committee and support Vito as the point-person on firm operations. I will continue to serve my clients and maintain my full caseload as co-chair of the Litigation Department, but will also work closely with the firm's Administrative Services departments to improve efficiency and processes going forward.

2. Why be in management? Why does it matter to you personally?


For the last 15 years, I have thrived within Porzio's workplace community – one that is uniquely nurturing and empowering and innovative. I have benefitted tremendously from the generous mentorship *and* sponsorship of several Porzio principals (male and female!), who provided me with endless opportunities to develop my skillset as both a practitioner and a leader. Through my role on the Management Committee, I will work with our people to identify new and innovative ways to meet the ever-changing needs of our clients while continuing to foster the supportive workplace environment that makes Porzio so special. I want to create opportunities for lawyers and professional staff members, alike, so that they, too, can flourish here.

3. What was the path you followed to reach this achievement?

Strong mentors and sponsors have been the key to my success, but I had to earn those relationships through hard work and demonstrated dedication to our clients and our Porzio community. Outstanding lawyers like Lauren Handler, Roy Alan Cohen, and Connie Matteo (now in-house at Pfizer) taught me the craft and gave me invaluable client-facing opportunities to hone and demonstrate my lawyering skills. Both Jeff Campbell and Vito Gagliardi spent endless hours coaching me about leadership versus management principles (there is a difference!) and about the business of law. Both Jeff and Vito put the full weight of their political capital behind me as I advanced from associate to partnership, and now to my role on the Management Committee. While I worked very hard to earn and succeed with every opportunity I was given, these amazing people pushed me and supported me every step of the way. I owe a great deal to each one of them.


4. What is the most exciting aspect of your new role, i.e. what are you looking forward to most?

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I am excited to work with Vito and the Management Committee on two initiatives:

(1) Targeted Growth Strategy--We want to grow the offerings provided by our family of companies, which span 5 offices, by strategically and very selectively acquiring talent in practice areas that are critical to the myriad of industries we serve.

(2) Innovation--I am honored to work alongside the women and men of our Administrative Services Departments – they provide the infrastructure on which we rely 24/7 to serve our clients' business and legal needs. Their hard work behind the scenes allows our attorneys to shine on behalf of clients in the courtrooms and in the boardrooms. I am excited to work more closely with them to innovate internal processes and continue to improve our overall approach to client service to promote greater efficiency.

5. What are your goals and plans as far as collaborative efforts, both inside and outside your law firm, to retain and advance women attorneys?

The recruitment, retention, and advancement of women and minority attorneys has been a high priority of Porzio, Bromberg & Newman for well over a decade – and it will remain so under Vito's leadership. It is engrained into our firm culture that a diverse workplace community serves the best interests of our clients and our people. At Porzio, we strive to create a professional environment and reputation that reflect our commitment to this fact. By sharing our unique perspectives and capabilities, we enrich our workplace and expand our potential.

Within Porzio, I have served on the Workplace Diversity Committee for several years. As the Managing Principal, Vito chairs the Committee, demonstrating the firm's commitment to honoring and respecting the unique views of each employee. The committee is comprised of varying levels of personnel, and meets frequently to evaluate its efforts and progress. Many initiatives radiate from the Diversity Committee's aggressive Twelve Month Action Plan, which details a number of proactive efforts to recruit and retain personnel of different backgrounds. Firm wide, the Diversity Committee seeks to educate and train our people on diversity awareness through outside speakers.

Outside of Porzio, I have learned so much from so many AMAZING women who are the lifeblood of the Women in the Law Committee. It is important to collaborate with attorneys from other firms to address diversity recruitment/retention/advancement issues head-on, and to learn from each other's initiatives and practices. Diversity is important industry-wide, and we all benefit from knowledge sharing. For example, I have been privileged to work with Heidi Friedman for the last 7+ years on DRI initiatives. Heidi generously shared her perspective and experience with building/operating a high-functioning women's initiative at Thompson Hine, as well as the component programs that have been critical to its success – such as Mother-to-BE Mentoring and 360 Mentoring Programs. At Porzio, we developed similar programs inspired by Thompson Hine's "Spotlight on Women" and our own Women's Initiative Network ("WIN") has been enriched as a result.

6. Please share some tips/advice for other women attorneys who aspire to management positions in their firms or in-house positions.

Work hard – really hard— and work strategically in order to demonstrate your ambition, work ethic, and talent. And then ASK FOR WHAT YOU WANT, in every aspect of your career. Ask for the reach assignments, and knock them out of the park. Ask to serve on client pitch teams, and support the senior lawyers in the arduous preparation of collateral materials. Ask about the criteria for promotion, and then ask for feedback on your performance against that criteria. Ask to work with partners who have substantial political capital, and once you've proven yourself and earned their trust, ask them to serve as your mentors. Ask to serve on management committees within your firm, and then deliver exceptional work product. And then pay it forward. As you rise in the ranks, reach down and pull up someone behind you by providing guidance and opportunities and sponsorship.

For the press release regarding Diane's Management Committee position, please follow this [link](#).