



GRIT

The Secret to Advancement

STORIES OF SUCCESSFUL WOMEN LAWYERS

Heather Macre

"If you have to cry, go outside."

—Kelly Cutrone

When asked to write about grit, this quote from MTV's faux reality hit, *The Hills*, leapt into my head. As some of you may recall, *The Hills* and its ilk chronicled the (largely invented) lives and (likely staged) loves of a small group of tan, wealthy, and feckless kids trying to make it in the urban jungle that is West Hollywood. Our not quite plucky heroine, L.C., found herself "working" for self-proclaimed public relations maven Kelly Cutrone, who hurled that little bon mot at L.C. after she had yet another breakdown in the open-plan office.

While the show was likely fake, Ms. Cutrone's guidance works in the real world. To me, this is the essence of grit—persevering even when it's difficult, picking yourself up when you have fallen down, and going back in for another round. Being a lawyer is tough; the hours are long, the work can be tedious, and sometimes, even when you shouldn't, you lose. You cannot let those losses define you; they are a part of the job, and I am quite sure that even the Notorious RBG—that is, Ruth Bader Ginsburg—has had a few motions denied.

You also must have inner grit, especially if you are practicing law whilst female. This is a profession where I, a partner at my firm, have been asked, on more than one occasion, if I am the court reporter when I arrive to take a deposition. And I am supposed to take some solace from the follow-up, that while I am not the court reporter, I sure am pretty enough to be one.

Of course, this is a trap, too. Women in the legal profession have to be "office pretty"—i.e., not so overly glamorous as to look unserious but not so dowdy as to look too serious. Entire law school discussions, corporate training seminars, and Above the Law message boards tell women how to dress, how to talk, how to be the right balance of smart, but not intimidating, commanding

but not bitchy. I am always shocked by the amount of ink spent debating whether peep toe shoes are appropriate for a courtroom.

So how does one navigate this world? Grit. Perseverance. No one has ever made a comment about my looks *after* I have finished taking their deposition. You cannot let it break you. I know because a male partner almost broke me when I was barely out of law school. His constant berating and his insane demands almost drove me from the profession. I watched as my ideas were constantly belittled while my male colleague was praised when he presented the exact same strategy. I cried outside, a lot, until one day I just quit. I walked out the door and thought hard about walking away from the law, but I decided that I could not let one person take away my career. In retrospect this seems clean and simple; at the time I can assure you it was not.

As women in the law, we do have to work harder and smarter than the boys just to be respected equally; we have to be grittier. We have to speak louder and worry less about perception. We should not be afraid to ask questions, because if you have a question everyone else is probably thinking about it, too. We can't let other people defeat us, and we have to stop being our own worst enemy. The analytical, see-both-sides skills we learn in school can make us our own worst enemies. We have to get out of our own way.

We need to advocate not just for our clients, but for ourselves. We cannot be afraid to state, clearly and openly, what our goals are—to get a raise, to make partner, to work on a certain case—and ask what we need to do to get there. We have to hold ourselves accountable and demand our just rewards when we meet the metrics. We have to fight to be treated equally and call out bias when we see it. I have gotten a lot of things in my career—the aforementioned partnership, the ability to handle cases that matter to me but don't bring in a lot of money—but I have only gotten those things because I asked for them and worked so hard that “no” wasn't an option. This is not because I am super smart or amazingly skilled—I work hard, I ask questions, and I persevere.

I am also mindful that while I have reached the milestone of partnership, I need to reach a hand down to other women, to help them get here, too. We are never going to be treated equally or be

given paid maternity leave or have our work valued at more than \$.77 to the \$1 unless there are more women behind the doors of the partners' meeting or in the C-Suite. When you are in management it is easy to get bogged down with other things plus your case load, but we all have the same number of hours in the day as Beyoncé, a woman who exudes grit. Tellingly, you never hear anyone say that you have the same number of hours in the day as Jay-Z.

I rest my case.

Heather Macre is a shareholder at Aiken Schenk Hawkins & Ricciardi P.C. in Phoenix, where she focuses on bankruptcy and commercial litigation. www.ashrlaw.com