



MTYBA

presents

Women of the Bar: Successes, Challenges, Goals

In celebration of the centenary of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919, a great opportunity arose to explore and discuss frankly the lives of women at the Bar, while also demystifying some of the common misconceptions.

On 10 April 2019, MTYBA invited a panel of three highly established barristers to the Queen's Room of the Middle Temple each of whom have achieved considerable success in their careers to date:



Sonali Naik QC
Garden Court Chambers



Helen Davies QC
Joint Head of Chambers
Brick Court Chambers



Jennifer Robinson
Doughty Street Chambers

The panel was chaired by [Karen Reid](#), barrister at The 36 Group and the former President of MTYBA.

[Caroline Dix](#), the Project Manager of the [First Hundred Years](#) project, delivered a presentation highlighting the importance of pre and post 1919 history.

“To inspire, we must know and understand our history of the journey of women in law.”



MTYBA

presents

Women of the Bar: Achieving Success

Misconception: Women at the Bar take on more work to prove a point that they are 'equal' to their counterparts

The idea that women at the Bar are taking on more work because they feel they have to prove themselves as 'equal' is highly misconceived. Taking on more work enables you to build your experience and develop your expertise. Sometimes, it's not about how much money you can make by taking on more work.

It is, however, about the quality of work you are instructed on. The type of work which involves very serious or complex issues that requires you to apply outstanding intellectual ability. The type of work that you are unlikely to have developed expertise for, until you have built that impressive portfolio by taking on *more work*.

Misconception: Women are particularly pressed by clerks to undertake a high volume of cases

Clerks focus on experience and availability when assigning cases, they are not giving you more work simply because you are a woman. If you are feeling pressed, you have to develop the strength and confidence to communicate this to your clerks.

Remember to approach, discuss and explain your availability. This will help to take care of your well-being; bear in mind the effect that poor well-being will have in your personal and professional life. This applies to everyone at the Bar.



MTYBA

presents

Women of the Bar: Facing Challenges

Misconception: **Women are more emotional and find it particularly difficult when dealing with emotionally challenging cases**

Yes, and no. Women do tend to discuss and express their thoughts more when compared to their male counterparts. However, having worked alongside male barristers in emotionally challenging cases, it is fair to say they are just as emotional.

You should feel comfortable to share and process your emotions regarding a case. It is important that all members of chambers form a greater understanding about dealing with emotionally challenging cases. It is more than likely that a member of chambers, woman or man, has had a similar experience and will be at hand to offer advice.

Misconception: **Impossible to achieve a career at the Bar and manage child care**

It is possible with effective communication with your clerks and chambers. Obtain a clear understanding by actively speaking with members of chambers and clerks to understand what has worked for them before and what hasn't. It is likely that your specific circumstances are unique, don't be afraid of changing arrangements until you find an arrangement that is suitable and sustainable.

Do be able to communicate changes to update your clerks. For example, during pupillage feel comfortable to update your pupil supervisor about any changes to your child care arrangements. You are likely to find that they are more accommodating and understanding than you think.



MTYBA

presents

Women of the Bar: Future Goals

Advice to current barristers in encouraging and supporting the future/junior Women of the Bar:

1. An open-door policy is a must;
 - Take the time out to approach and make it explicit that your door is always open. Some may be facing a problem now; some may face one later on. If you cannot help, take the time to think and research solutions.
2. Promote an attitude of providing mutual support;
 - That initial support/reassurance can be very important in not only supporting but retaining women in the profession.
3. Continue to share the methods you used to manage your responsibilities, the challenges you face and what you did to overcome them.

Tips to your-junior-self when you entered the Bar:

- Be less naïve: yes, the statistics of women at the Bar have improved but disparity continues to exist;
- Be more prepared to speak up/challenge a situation. However, be sensible and understand the mechanisms available to you and most suitable to deploy. If such mechanisms are unavailable, be confident to advise the member of chambers responsible or the head of chambers, about the need of such a mechanism;
- Be aware that some abuse power and position. Form allies, so that they can help you be heard;
- Think long-term, construct a strategic business plan. For example, what private work can you do to complement your legal aid work? Think how will this plan enable my retention at the Bar? Understand that health challenges arise unexpectedly. What can you do to plan? Who can help?

Merlene George | MTYBA Advocacy Officer