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Tributes To Professionalism

THE HOUSTON

lawyer

Volume 59 – Number 4

January/February 2022

Women in the Law

INNOVATIVE COMMUNITY LEADERS:

Celebrating Local Women Attorneys and Their Impact as Changemakers

The *Houston Lawyer* is proud to feature six women attorneys who inspire us through their dedication to service, commitment to community, and cultivation of the next generation of lawyers. Their fascinating responses demonstrate the very best of the Houston legal community—selflessness, relentless determination, and the ability to change the world around them. The full transcript can be found on *The Houston Lawyer* page at [hba.org](https://www.hba.org).



Maisha Coulter, CEO, Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (“AVDA”) | Tireless Advocate for Survivors of Domestic Violence

1. Tell us a bit about your professional background and what led you to your current position.

I am a social worker and attorney by education. I received a Master’s in Social Work from New York University in 1997 and my Juris Doctor from Rutgers University in 2001. I have been purposeful about pursuing work that allows me to draw on the strengths of my educational training in social work and law. Fortunately, I found AVDA shortly after I was licensed to practice law in the State of Texas. I originally reached out to volunteer but was hired by the agency as the only full-time staff attorney at the time. I have progressed in my practice and experience through the years. I believe all of that practice and experience resulted in my selection as the CEO of AVDA in 2019.

2. What achievement—personal or professional—are you most proud of?

I am most proud of raising a strong and capable daughter. Doing this successfully requires me to be a standard-bearer and strong role model for her. Although that work is not complete (she’s 11), I feel the proudest of my role as her mother and derive the most joy in this life experience.

3. What are you currently reading?

I just finished reading Trevor Noah’s autobiography, *Born A Crime*. A friend gifted me with the book. It is hilarious and profound. I was not aware of his personal experience with domestic violence, but of course—given my work—that stood out to me the most.

4. What women have inspired you—personally, professionally, or both—and why?

My mother and my maternal grandmother are my personal heroes. They are the epitome of strength, hard work, and commitment. They draw on spiritual faith and traditions that they were intentional in passing on, and I received their life training and example with gratitude. My grandmother has passed on, but my mother is alive and healthy and is still my go-to person when I am challenged personally or professionally.

5. Why, in your opinion, are women natural-born leaders?

I think certain traits are critical for good leaders. Those include compassion, being an effective communicator, and being able to develop people. It is not that men don’t have these traits, but I think girls and women get more encouragement in developing compassion and learning how to effectively communicate as they grow.

6. What called you to get involved with domestic violence work?

I think having the direct experience working with a family in Brooklyn that was devastated by domestic abuse led me to prioritize work that focused on domestic violence in my career. The children, four little boys, witnessed their father killing their mother. Their grandmother was raising them. I provided trauma counseling to the family and learned so much from them.

7. What is the most immediate, practical assistance someone can give to a survivor of domestic abuse?

An open and empathetic ear.

8. How can an attorney give practical assistance?

Attorneys should learn how domestic violence affects the family system. They should also learn as much about the relief available in the Texas Family Code to survivors of domestic abuse as they can, and, if that is not their area of practice, they should know three strong attorneys who do practice in this area.

9. While women's leadership appears to be increasing in smaller nonprofits, medium to large organizations are still more likely to be run by a male CEO. What are your thoughts as to how this gender gap can be closed?

This can only happen if those responsible for selecting leadership are deliberate about diversity and inclusion. Many of the boards that select executive leadership have their own issues with a lack of diversity.



Mia Lorick, Partner, Locke Lord LLP | Founder of the Suited for Success Scholarship

1. Tell us a bit about your

professional background and what led you to your current position.

I am a litigation and appellate partner at Locke Lord LLP. My undergraduate degree is a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Modern Dance, and I attended the University of Houston Law Center for law school. My performance background is what sparked my interest in litigation during law school. To this day, I love the performance aspect of being in the courtroom. As a young lawyer, I was given the opportunity to try cases and handle appellate arguments. I started at a Texas-based firm, and from day one I was determined to get as much experience as possible. I did that by volunteering to help other lawyers on cases, speaking at CLEs, and learning from more experienced lawyers. After six years, I lateralled to my current role with Locke Lord, and I love it here.

2. What achievement—personal or profes-

sional—are you most proud of?

I am most proud of becoming board certified in civil appellate law after only five years of practice. Not only was I able to achieve the experience level required to sit for the exam, but I also studied for several months while maintaining my billable hours at work and being a mom to a three-year-old. I knew the exam would be difficult because, at the time, the pass rate was 20%. So, during the three months leading up to the exam, I woke up at 4:30 a.m. every day and studied for three hours. It was brutal. But I did it, and I passed.

3. What women have inspired you—personally, professionally, or both—and why?

Personally, I am inspired by my mom. She was widowed at the age of 36 with three young children, and I never once saw her lose her “fight.” She raised me and my sisters to be strong, empathetic women, and I want to be just like her when I grow up.

Professionally, I am inspired by Justice Eva Guzman. Often seated amongst men who do not look like her, she has never let that slow her ambition or her career. And, despite her

accomplishments, she is extremely kind and humble. A few years ago, I mustered up the courage to approach her after a CLE to tell her how much she inspired me, and she gave me the best advice: to never think I’m too young or don’t have enough experience to go after a career goal. It was this advice that made me believe I could take and pass the board certification exam. And, a year later, when I applied to sit for the exam, Justice Guzman graciously agreed to be my reference.

4. Why, in your opinion, are women natural-born leaders?

I don’t think all women are natural-born leaders, particularly those who while growing up repeatedly heard that they could not rise to the level of success men can. Can you blame them? Many women, myself included, strategically fight against this and choose to be leaders. We choose to speak up when it’s uncomfortable, we choose to sit at tables as the only women—and, in my case, often times the only person of color—and, we choose to gracefully accept the backlash that

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This year, the Houston-area Pathway Forensics team joined Crowe LLP, which is recognized as a legal operations multiservice provider and one of 18 leading innovators in this space by ALM Intelligence. When your lawyers face digital forensics and cybersecurity issues that require expert-witness testimony, call on a reputable firm with extensive courtroom experience. Call on Crowe.

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comes with shattering the glass ceiling. Yes, I am a leader. It may appear to be natural, but it took a lot of grit and fight to step into this role.

5. You're the founder of the Suited for Success Scholarship, which awards law students the funds needed to buy a business suit for interviewing. What inspired you to establish this program?

I was inspired to start the Suited for Success Scholarship because I remember being in law school and having sticker shock when buying my first suit. I bought one suit, and it cost \$350. Over time, I realized that one suit wasn't enough, and that I would need to spend a little more money if I wanted the suit to last longer than a year. It was a financial burden—one that I remember vividly. Luckily, I had family to help me. But that is not the case for many students. So, the scholarship is to provide law students with the money to buy a nice business suit. Wearing a poorly fitted, unmatched suit to an interview kills your confidence. I want to help students overcome that.

6. What long-term community impact do you hope it makes?

I hope to expand the scholarship to every law school in Texas and increase donations so that more scholarships can be given each year. The impact is vast because it shows law students that this is not an elitist profession, but rather one of inclusion and support. I hope the scholarship inspires other people to give back and that it helps foster a community of support and mentorship.



Stacey E. Burke,
Attorney and
Owner, Stacey E.
Burke, PC, Law
Firm Marketing
Solutions | Business
Consultant
Raising Visibility

of Women Entrepreneurs

1. Tell us a bit about your professional background and what led you to your current position.

I began working in the legal field during

law school on cases ranging from mass toxic exposure claims along the Texas coast to poverty law matters in Los Angeles. I spent many of my first years of practice handling plaintiffs' personal injury litigation cases with a strong focus on maritime injuries and industrial accidents, reaching the rank of senior associate before age 30. I was hired away from my first firm by a much larger firm to work on more complex catastrophic injury and wrongful death cases—along with a very large volume of class action and mass tort cases—as a partner. I left the partnership in 2013 with no intention of starting my own business. I was taking a mental health break from what had become a stressful and sometimes toxic environment to spend more time as a single parent of two young children. During what was intended as a hiatus, I was bombarded with requests for consulting assistance from my former competitors, and thus my consulting business was born.

2. What achievement—personal or professional—are you most proud of?

I am most proud of being a true entrepreneur—using solely my own funds and no loans to start my company as a single working mother and growing it from a business of one (just me) to now seven full-time employees and two contract workers. This shows my two daughters that their mother is a successful, industry-recognized expert—and I achieved this not by choosing the path already paved, but by forging my own way even when it was scary and financially risky in order to provide them with more access to me and to model for them that a woman can do it all herself.

3. What are you currently reading?

I am reading *Contemporary Left Antisemitism* by David Hirsch. The focus is on highlighting an ugly vein of bigotry that disfigures some substantial portions of the political left in the UK and beyond. In law school, I was the first Jew many of my classmates had ever met, which shocked me, although it should not have. I realized then, more than ever before, that I have to learn more about my identity because, whether I like it or not, I

will serve as an example to others of what a Jew is. As antisemitism has increased worldwide in recent years, I have chosen to further educate myself on its root causes and how I can be of service to help eradicate false narratives and combat bigotry not just for Jews but for all marginalized groups.

4. You have a seasoned and highly respected business that provides marketing and business development consulting services to law firms. How has leading your own company empowered you?

Leading my own company has meant creating success all on my own. Before, I was privileged to work with, and under, some of the most wonderful and supportive bosses in the business. But on my own, I could no longer hide behind my more successful and well-known partners and had to step out in front and be the face of my own professional destiny. It's been alternately anxiety-inducing and liberating, but still remains at times uncomfortable for me. I built my entire prior career off of promoting the quality work of my employers and law partners, so self-promotion of myself as the primary talent does not come naturally for me. Not being able to avoid doing it, however, has empowered me to build up my own individual brand and achieve professional goals I never even considered having, such as prestigious speaking engagements and authoring pieces for respected publications. It is also extremely empowering to know that my work supports my family financially.

5. Why, in your opinion, is female business ownership visibility important?

Female business ownership visibility is extremely important because the U.S. sadly lags behind many other democratic nations in addressing the pain points that inhibit women from becoming entrepreneurs, as well as in empowering women into executive and leadership roles within existing corporate structures. Women should become founders so they can empower more women to take on leadership roles and become founders themselves, thus ultimately removing the gender disparity in business ownership and leadership. In addition, women

founders inspire younger women by showing them that regardless of gender identity, one can not only succeed professionally, but lead and own a business. Furthermore, by increasing the number of applicants and designees for these women-owned business funds and certifications, we show the government, and society in general, that women are a meaningful component of the capitalist structure who need to be financed and considered as equals in businesses.



Sofia Adrogué
Partner, Diamond McCarthy LLP | Author, Consultant & Civic Leader
[Sofia Adrogué (far right) with

her daughter, Sloane Adrogué Gustafson, and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor]

1. Tell us a bit about your professional background and what led you to your current position.

I am a bilingual native of Argentina, a litigator of 25-plus years who recently celebrated my 10th anniversary as a Texas Super Lawyer and was featured as one of six Texas Super Lawyer immigrants in the state. Having commenced my career in Houston at Susman Godfrey, I am a trial partner with Diamond McCarthy LLP, a national business litigation and insolvency boutique. I have handled matters for clients in diverse industries in Texas, Buenos Aires, and Mexico City—among other places—and have obtained favorable judgments and settlements on behalf of both plaintiffs and defendants in U.S. state and federal courts and in ADR proceedings. At the outset of my career, I taught mass torts as an adjunct professor at the University of Houston Law Center and had the honor of clerking for the Hon. Jerre S. Williams, U.S. Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit.

2. What achievement—personal or professional—are you most proud of?

Personally, my nuclear family, particularly my children, has taught me about “summit

climbing.” My two daughters, Sloane and Schuyler, and my son, Stefan, have provided me the base from which to climb successfully, and, ideally, one day, reach the summit.

Seeking to simultaneously navigate my professional and community endeavors, while truly difficult to selectively highlight, I am humbled to have been selected as one of “The 25 U.S. Most Influential Hispanic Lawyers” and “Most Powerful Women in Law” by Latino Leaders; a World Affairs Council of Greater Houston “Global Leader of Influence”; a Comcast Hispanic Hero; a Greater Houston Women’s Chamber “Hall of Fame” inductee; a Houston Chronicle “Texas Legend” and one of ten “Extraordinary Latinos”; a UH Law Center Immigration Clinic “Arrival Awards Immigrant Achievement” Honoree; a Houston Jaycees “Outstanding Houstonian”; a Texas Jaycees “Outstanding Texan”; and a U.S. Jaycees “Outstanding Young American.” Of significant import as well, I envisioned, and I am the editor of ALM’s Texas Business Litigation treatise, with Hon. Caroline Baker as

the co-editor and a 5th Edition (over 2,000 pages) just published—a true labor of love.

3. Who or what served as the catalyst for your decades-long commitment to serving and empowering others?

Although 5,000 miles away from my place of birth, there is no doubt that as a Houstonian I am inordinately proud of the endless possibilities of our city. I concur with Dr. Stephen Klineberg, Founding Director of the Kinder Institute for Urban Research at Rice University, who praises Houston as a “Prophetic City” that is at the “Cusp of a Changing America.” The U.S. is the land of opportunity where meritocracy and egalitarianism flourish and where education is the great equalizer; I am such a product. Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, I immigrated to the U.S. at the age of eight with my father, Dr. Horacio J. Adrogué, my mother, Sara Oyenard Adrogué, and my four siblings (Horacio E., Soledad, Matias, and Marcos). The Adrogués arrived in Boston at Logan Airport with fourteen suitcases, speaking little to no English, originally funded by a \$5,000 grant

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from the World Health Organization. Seeking to return in multiples all the opportunities this country has provided me, I hope my efforts evidence my passion, leadership, and commitment to this nation and its diverse population.

4. Which of your community service experiences has impacted you the most and why?

Throughout my life, particularly in the last twenty-five years, I have sought to express in a tangible manner my sincere devotion to not only my professional endeavors, but also to community service, believing the Jaycees motto that “service to humanity is the best work of life.” Although it is challenging to highlight one, I am proud of the Youth Leadership Forum (“YLF”) for Houston’s Youth at Rice University that I envisioned and co-founded with Hon. Caroline Baker over 15 years ago. The biannual event for high school students draws 350 of Houston’s aspiring leaders from a cross-section of Houston schools, including Cristo Rey Jesuit College Preparatory School of Houston, Chinquapin College Preparatory School, AAMA’s George I. Sanchez Charter High School, and YES Preparatory Public Schools, among others. With a mission to Engage, Educate & Empower—By Service We Lead, we developed YLF to provide youth with educational opportunities outside of a traditional classroom, address leadership, general governance, and an insight that with education and hard work, our youth may ideally accomplish their dreams. Notable past participants include Hon. James A. Baker, Hon. Al Gonzalez, Hon. Eva Guzman, and Hon. Sylvester Turner, among many other elected officials, business professionals, and community leaders.

5. How, in your opinion, does giving back make us more effective professionals and advocates?

The global humanitarian challenge of COVID-19 upended every aspect of life, threatening both lives and livelihoods. As we transition into 2022, we are faced with the greatest leadership tests of our lifetimes—professionally and personally. Serving on nonprofit boards, the Houston Bar Associa-

tion, or a grassroots community organization exposes us to a cross-section of humanity, allowing us to use our skills as advocates and facilitators, and furthers our appreciation of the diversity of leadership styles and opportunities for pragmatic, authentic impact. Such dedicated work and service inure to our benefit as we then seek to resolve a litany of issues, from the simplest to the most complex, of commensurate benefit to our clients and our practice.



Justine Faranof,
Lawyer, The Mindful Law Firm™ | Wellness Advocate & Yoga Instructor

1. Tell us a bit about your professional background and what led you to your current position.

I am the granddaughter of anti-apartheid activists, and justice is a profound North Star in my life. I am also a creative and studied documentary film as an undergrad at UT Austin. After working in the world of network news in LA, I returned to Texas, completed my Master’s in Public Health, clerked at the Texas Legislature, and got my J.D. at South Texas College of Law Houston. I then became a civil rights attorney, and my first job out of law school was the profound portfolio of Southwest Civil Rights Counsel for the Anti-Defamation League. I transitioned from nonprofit service to self-employment in 2017, and my firm Justine Fanarof, PLLC offers a mindful and social justice-oriented approach to general counsel and ADR. I have taught yoga and mindfulness for two decades, and my firm also offers wellness consulting, coaching, and continuing education to the legal and medical fields. I believe wellness is a core personal and business value and enjoy supporting my clients in learning about the radical roots of self-care (thank you Audre Lorde), creating organizational mindfulness programs, and in growing global spaces of well-being.

2. What women have inspired you

—personally, professionally, or both—and why?

Gertrude Gelb—my maternal grandmother—was born in England in 1912, made to leave school at 14, and took a boat by herself to South Africa in 1937. She became a trade unionist, anti-apartheid activist, mother of three, and businesswoman. She was imprisoned by the racist government of South Africa, went on a hunger strike, and was a banned person for many years. She came to live with us in Texas when I was in high school, and when Mandela was released from Robbin Island, she returned to South Africa to support the registration of women voters. She traveled the world solo, wore caftans, costume jewelry, and bright red lipstick. She taught me everything I can ever know about courage, community, and fortitude.

One of my closest friends, Stacey Burke—Houston attorney, marketing maven, and businesswoman—is also a true inspiration. Stacey has been one of my most ardent supporters and friends since we were 14! She is mom to two beautiful daughters. Stacey and I share a deep commitment to social justice, antisemitism, gender equality, community work, and family. She continues to inspire me to work hard, practice diligently, and dance in the sand.

My mom, Beverly Fanarof, is my greatest mentor. She worked for many years as a pediatric physical therapist and is a neurodevelopmental baby expert, successful businesswoman, amazing athlete (tennis, swimming, basketball, hiking, oh my!), and bridge player. She is a devoted mom and wife and excels at caring for her family and friends. She is a committed volunteer, active in a range of organizations, including Holocaust Museum Houston, and is deeply respected and loved by everyone who knows her. She is the first person I go to when I need thoughtful and caring counsel and a good cup of tea.

Marjorie Joseph, the Executive Director of Houston Coalition Against Hate, is a true friend, collaborator, and social justice and self-care comrade. She is a pure joy, and her compassionate and inclusive leadership style continues to teach me how to come

from a place of power. I am grateful to work closely with MJ over the years and excited to see how our coalition continues to grow.

3. How has your wellness and yoga practice informed your approach to practicing law?

I am taking a big inhale and exhale and re-adjusting my posture as I read and respond to this question. The primary thing that my wellness and yoga practice has given me over the years is a practice that allows me to breathe, pause, and assess, to notice and feel, and to adjust and bring greater awareness to areas that are neglected. That practice may allow me to sit with a child who has been abandoned by their country and the legal system or the lawyer who is hitting the bar too hard. My practice teaches me that the work I do as a change agent and social justice advocate must include supporting changes to the criminal justice system, highlight the incarceration of Black and brown humans, and state a true desire to abolish the death penalty within my lifetime.

My practices help me see things more clearly, to realize possibilities, alternatives, opportunities, spaces for closure, and change. I practice and teach mindfulness as tenderness and care in an embodied, justice-oriented sense. I hope that my legal practice, and the ways that I interact with my clients and colleagues, reflects that deep work of practice. As a student of ethics, the basic te-

nets of ancient traditions bring me closer to the daily practice of living a life of valor. The courage that I develop in my own life allows me to support others in their epic journeys. This makes me a conscious, caring, responsive, and reflective partner to my clients and colleagues, and allows us to grow together through the uncertainty of life.

4. In addition to managing your practice, providing wellness and mindfulness training for attorneys, and teaching yoga, you also serve as Board President of Houston Coalition Against Hate. What is the connection between yoga and social justice, and how do you hope to use this unique intersectionality to effectuate change in our community?

The ethical practices of yoga include a call to protection for all beings. In Sanskrit the term is ahimsa. We know this term as Dr. King's call to non-violence, and we have so many opportunities to bring the vision of peace and security for all beings to a true reality. Climate justice, houselessness, income inequality, voting rights, the incarceration of Black and brown men and women, immigration reform, rights of the child, hate crimes, gender equality—these are all specific areas within the realm of social justice, and they all have the thread of protection embedded within them. What will it look like if we collectively assess our systems of injustice with a lens towards justice? What if we collaborate, connect, and come together as a community to create new possibilities, different

realities, offer truth and reconciliation, and opportunities for growth and change? What if we look at things on micro and macro levels and commit to bringing more peace and ease into people's lives? What if we don't always neglect the qualitative in favor of the quantitative?

I see this attention, this mindfulness, this awareness, this comprehensive understanding of complexity as the work of the social justice warrior, the yogi, the lawyer, and Houston Coalition Against Hate. There is no distinction between any of them, and there never was. When I see that the other person is me, I awaken into the reality that there is nothing more important than healing the world.

Thank you so much for this amazing opportunity to share and connect with the readers of *The Houston Lawyer*—I know each of you is committed to deep practices of care and community, and I know any one of you reading this is also my greatest teacher. 🏛️

Jennifer R. Jenkins owns and manages her own law practice. She is licensed in state and federal court and practices in both criminal and civil defense. Commitment to service and community empowerment are a bedrock for the Law Office of Jennifer R. Jenkins.

Jennifer Smith is Director of Communication and Associate Corporate Counsel at an oilfield services firm. She has worked in the oilfield industry for more than 20 years.



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