

# FIRM FOR A BOUTIQUE

By Keith Regan | Special to the Journal

Though his portfolio already contains its share of wins, Adam Lewis doesn't need to think long when asked whether there's a legal victory of which he's most proud.

"Definitely the Turnpike case," he said. "It was a high-profile case, with high stakes. Through sheer grit and hard work, we won."

Lewis and partner Brian Kaplan led the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority's defense of a \$500 million class action suit brought on behalf of toll-payers by Schlichtmann whose pursuit of W.R. Grace became the basis for the book and movie *A Civil Action*.

The defense fought off injunctions and attempts to freeze Turnpike assets and won a motion to dismiss the suit. (The case is under appeal; Lewis' firm is no longer involved.)

Lewis and Kaplan worked at Hill & Barlow before they founded their own litigation boutique. Weeks after they struck out on their own, the century-old firm dissolved.

"I left all the creature comforts of a big firm feeling it was the right move," he said. Still, he worried referrals would disappear with the firm. "But what happened was all those lawyers I learned from and worked alongside fanned out in Boston and actually created more referral sources for us."

#### What are your top three goals for the year?

First, we aim to be the best business and real estate litigation boutique in the Boston area. Second, we expect to add more large real estate developers to our firm's growing client base. Third, we'll keep providing big firm quality representation to our corporate clients at far more reasonable rates.

#### What are your guiding principles for good management?

Delegate, set the bar high, and expect excellence.

#### What is the best business decision you've made?

I convinced Brian Kaplan, my business partner, to leave the large prestigious law firm where we both worked, and establish our own practice. Brian is an excellent strategist, a brilliant tactician, and a tour de force in the courtroom. Partners don't get any better.

#### And what is the toughest business decision you've made?

It wasn't easy to walk away from the creature comforts of a big firm and set up a business and real estate litigation boutique. Ten years later, it's clear that it was the right decision for me.

#### Who were or are your mentors?

I've benefited from the guidance of countless incredible lawyers. Dick Renahan of Goulston & Storrs is a good friend to our firm. He's the best I've seen in any courtroom. He's also generous with his time

and disarmingly modest. I've also benefited from the insights and generosity of several A-list lawyers: Bruce Falby, Richard Zimski, Greg Bialecki, Jim Aloisi, Mike Vhay, Chris Noble, and too many others to name here.

#### What is your overall view of the Boston area as a place to do business?

Boston is a big city with the familiarity of a smaller community. Business relationships developed here last a lifetime.

#### What are your civic passions and how do you give back?

Providing pro bono representation for individuals who have faced criminal charges but are unable to afford counsel has been an important way for me to offer my skills to those in need. My family and I also work to support charities that promote social justice, such as Rosie's Place, which does excellent work on behalf of poor and homeless women.

#### Do you have a motto you follow in business or in life?

Life is short. Spend time with the people you care about.

#### What is the most influential book you've read?

Virtually anything by Kurt Vonnegut: "Breakfast of Champions," "The Sirens of Titan," "Cat's Cradle." Vonnegut showed us the best and worst of humanity in language that is simple but blistering.

#### What is your favorite restaurant?

For a night out, it's Hamersley's Bistro in the South End. For comfort food, it's a toss up between Johnny's Luncheonette in Newton Centre and Zaftigs in Coolidge Corner.

#### What's on your iPod?

Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Foo Fighters, Music Together (for my kids).

#### What's your favorite getaway spot?

St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands. The tiny island has little more than pristine beaches, clear water, and infinite sunshine. It's perfect.

## LESSONS LEARNED

What should be required reading for entrepreneurs?

**JOHN F. DOHERTY**,  
FishAye Trading Co.



"The Art of the Start" by Guy Kawasaki. The book deals with the raw essentials of starting

anything. The feeling of the book gives you the freedom to find your direction. The focus is on what's real. It doesn't waste time on things of little value.

**NEAL SHRIER**,  
Shrier Works Inc.



In addition to their respective trade journals, every entrepreneur should be reading

Norm Brodsky's articles in Inc. magazine. They're relevant with great insight from a seasoned entrepreneur.

**PAMELA OLIVER STEPHENSON**,  
Horizon Business Valuations LLC



"How to Win Friends and Influence People" by Dale Carnegie. No matter what

business you are in, knowing how to relate to and interact with people is a critical skill.

**Next week's Lesson Learned:** What ultimately inspired you to start your own business?

Send your answer in 25-30 words to [cmahoney@bizjournals.com](mailto:cmahoney@bizjournals.com). Be sure to include a high-resolution headshot.

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**AWARDEE**

Paula Cholmondeley of The Sorrell Group sought mentorship from women in other companies. **30**

**AWARDEE**

Angel investor Jean Hammond specializes in advising early stage, high-tech startups. **31**

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# own paths to leadership roles

leads, helped her establish her footing and said women need to explore options for mentorship and sponsorship.

"It's all about choice over chance," said Davis, who has been at Deloitte for 15 years and a partner for the past five. "Many women have a philosophy that if they put their heads down and do a good job and work hard, those opportunities will come. What we're learning and what studies tell us is that it's just as important to make sure that the right folks are aware of you and thinking of you and sponsoring you for those opportunities for development."

"It's all about the whole package," Davis added. "It's about working hard and having those solid technical skills, but also about taking those actions to put yourself out there. I'm one of those people who worked very hard, but as I look back I also had those people who were pounding the table for me to

put me in those situations and on those client assignments that would help me grow and develop."

Still, despite huge gains, even the most optimistic women acknowledge that subtle and often unintended bias lingers in some parts of the business world.

As a woman in a male-dominated industry — providing energy-services contracts to facilities managers and executives at health care institutions — one of the biggest challenges Lisa Schoonerman faces on a daily basis is perception.

"My biggest challenge is overcoming stereotypes," said Schoonerman, health care solutions manager at Siemens. "When facilities directors walk into a room, they don't expect to see a young female across the table. I love to watch how I can change people's initial perceptions and gain their confidence. They find out pretty quickly that I know what I'm talking about."

## WE ASKED A NUMBER OF AREA PROFESSIONALS WHAT KINDS OF SUPPORT SHOULD BE IN PLACE TO HELP WOMEN DEVELOP LEADERSHIP SKILLS. A FEW OF THEIR RESPONSES:



Leadership development begins at the top. Transparent messaging and actions from the highest level of leadership ensuring that everyone understands and credits the value of gender diversity is key. Too often, there is lip service without actual understanding and support.

**Renee Inomata**  
Partner, Employment, Intellectual Property  
Burns & Levinson LLP



Leadership is a relational experience. We learn through watching it, talking about it, doing it, reflecting and getting feedback. Organizations dedicated to developing women leaders will provide support for these activities through mentoring/coaching, training, networking and higher-level experiences.

**Marie Peeler**  
Peeler Associates Leadership Development



Mentoring is the key to developing leadership skills for women in the workplace. A caring mentor provides education, experience, validation and self-esteem that teach women to think strategically and succeed. A mentor also serves as a great role model."

**Jeannette C. Travaline**  
Founder, Dynamic Divas  
Senior VP, retail/sales/marketing  
South Coastal Bank



Organizations should increase the transparency of their leadership training and development programs. Companies can provide more resources and social networking opportunities in flexible work arrangements, increasing the chances for women to advance in a leadership role if they are interested.

**Cathy Follett**  
President, Hanover Chamber of Commerce  
CEO, Renovations Inc.



A successful path toward female leadership requires an environment that fosters transparency; access to a mentor for support and advice; employee benefits that address family commitments, encouraging focus and loyalty; and, a business model that demands collaboration to achieve success.

**Sheila Lirio Marcelo**  
Founder and CEO, Care.com



We believe the winning combination for developing leadership skills in women is cultivating a solid foundation of mutual trust — an open-door, approachable, highly communicative working environment — then fostering their entrepreneurial spirit through project ownership, problem solving and creativity.

**Wendy Spivak**  
Principal and Founder,  
The Castle Group



One woman's rise to the top is meaningless unless she brings others along. To change this paradigm, women need to create a culture that mentors, guides and grooms one another for success. Together, women hold the key to advancement.

**Sydney Leo**  
Managing Director, Business Advisory Services  
Grant Thornton



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# For women on the corporate ladder — it's a balancing act

While the gender gap may have become less wide over the past couple decades, a disparity of compensation at the executive/management level between men and women remains an issue.

Anecdotally, I recently had access to a comparison of CEO-level compensation within my industry specialty.

I discovered that the highest paid individual was a male whose scope of responsibilities was far fewer than many of his female counterparts in the non-profit home health and hospice field — including mine.

It may be easier — and frequently quite accurate — to point a finger elsewhere, but often women encounter inequity simply because they don't self-advocate for higher compensation and increased benefits. This disadvantage is certainly evident within the non-profit health care industry, a field populated by women whose general commitment to the workplace often undercuts both their income and home life.

Indeed, the stress of women/wives/mothers who are attempting to earn a living and obtain some semblance of balance at home can be overwhelming.



**MEG DOHERTY**  
CEO OF NVNA AND HOSPICE

The nursing profession in particular can be very demanding, both physically and due to the need for swift and accurate decision-making skills regarding patient care.

And while some would argue that technology has made all our lives easier — including those of us in the medical field — the sheer ability to be available 24/7 creates additional stress. The workplace culture now practically demands instant response to phone calls, emails and text messages, making it next to impossible for many in the nursing field to truly take a day off.

Unlike other professions where a project can wait a day or two to be completed, questions about specific patient care must be answered immediately, even during a so-called vacation day. At any level and in any profession people need time off to regroup and refresh.

These increasing demands have

prompted NVNA and Hospice to offer a variety of health-related programs for our predominantly female staff, including yoga and pilates to reduce stress. Ironically, most of our staff members don't have the time to take advantage of these tension-reducing opportunities simply because they are rushing home to other responsibilities.

Trying to maintain that fine balancing act between work and home has made flexibility not only a desire but a necessity for most women experiencing this divisive tug. To that end, NVNA and Hospice successfully attempts to provide flexible scheduling to allow our personnel time to attend their child's soccer game, visit an aging parent, etc.

Professional care-givers, after all, have the same responsibilities outside the workplace as anyone else, and as with any profession, quite often the higher you are on the corporate ladder, the more difficult it is to maintain equilibrium at home.

Flexibility in the workplace now does translate to many industries where both men and women can work from home. And contrary to popular opinion, management studies have found that people who work from home are actually more productive than those at the office. Technology has

opened up a whole new world for achieving work/life balance.

From my perspective, women remain in a difficult position when considering career advancement. Mid- and higher-level management positions require additional hours, night meetings, weekend seminars, travel, etc. It's true that an increasing number of executive doors now have women's nameplates on them, yet the cost of advancement can take its toll on family life and sometimes personal health.

The result is that people today are deliberately making the decision on whether or not to advance their careers with the focus on how it will impact their family life.

While it may look good on paper to say "we've come a long way" the reality remains that the balancing act many female executives must perform daily still differs from their male peers, as does our earning power. We may have traversed a great distance, but there is still road ahead.

**Meg Doherty** is the CEO of NVNA and Hospice, [www.nvna.org](http://www.nvna.org). NVNA and Hospice of Norwell is an independent nonprofit home health care agency serving Boston's South Shore. NVNA and Hospice has provided essential health care and education to South Shore residents since 1920.



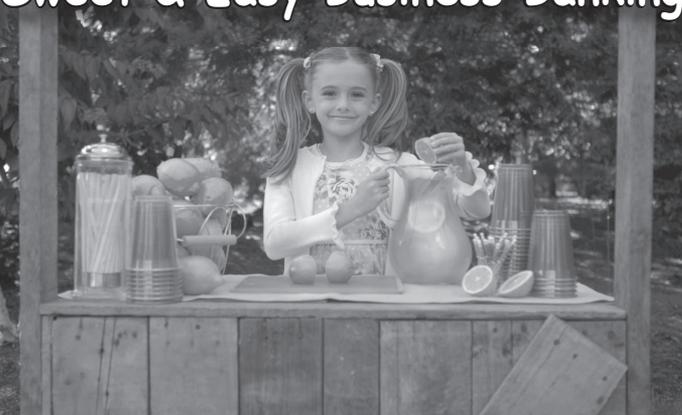
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