

Breaking IP Barriers: Q&A With Cadwalader's Dorothy Auth

By Dani Kass

Law360 (August 30, 2021, 3:02 PM EDT) -- When Dorothy Auth, the head of Cadwalader Wickersham & Taft LLP's intellectual property group, broke into the patent world nearly three decades ago, she relied on her doctorate in biochemistry and a collaborative approach to rise through the ranks of the male-dominated industry.

The New York-based partner litigates patent cases in the biotechnology sector and other industries as well as focuses on patent procurement, among other work. She also led Cadwalader's Women's Leadership Initiative for several years.

She started out as a scientific adviser, backed by her Ph.D. from Tufts University, and then attended night school at St. John's University School of Law. She began her legal career at Morgan & Finnegan, where she spent 17 years before joining Cadwalader in 2007.



Dorothy Auth

She spoke with Law360 as part of an ongoing series of interviews with attorneys who have been on the front lines to make IP a more inclusive area of law.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity

How did you end up leading the IP group?

I started as a scientific adviser. Because I had a Ph.D. in biochemistry, I was put on many of the early biotech litigation cases and did patent prosecution work. Getting involved in litigation was more competitive. My extended degree in the sciences allowed me to get involved in litigation in a very particular way, and that is dealing with the experts.

Throughout my career, having that Ph.D. has helped me move through the ranks and get opportunities that may or may not have come to me as a woman in IP law. In carrying out litigation, I would be the person who would interact with the experts. I'd be in charge of looking through expert notebooks because I had written in lab notebooks a lot, so I understood them. Diving in at that expert discovery level was different than you would if you were a normal associate in the first or second year.

Then you show leadership as you're going through. I came to Cadwalader, and within about six months,

they promoted me to partner here. They asked me to lead the Women's Leadership Initiative and promote women in a way that was valuable to the juniors and helped me get integrated into the firm. After a few more litigations, I was asked to lead the IP group. It was a progression, but it stemmed from my desire to do really well with clients and satisfy them.

Can you tell me about your work leading the firm's Women's Leadership Initiative?

When I was asked to take over, it was a hibernating organization. It hadn't been very active for several years.

We started having regular lunches. We'd get together once a week and sit and talk, and I think it was very nice because it brought senior partners together with very junior people who never would have otherwise met each other. I remember conversations where we talked about the astonishing cost of preschools in Manhattan and the hoops people were going through to get into a Pre-K program, and navigating that with the politics of the firm.

We set up a sponsorship program, where we'd take senior associates and partner them in a formal manner with a partner, mostly women, but they didn't have to be. This would be a multi-year program where the associate and the partner would work together, and they would meet regularly to talk about next steps to partnership. How can I make partner? What needs to be done? On the partner side, they would commit to introducing the mentee to different partners in their group or other groups, and introduce them to clients so they could have a better opportunity to start their book of business. This program has now become a diversity sponsorship program, where we do it for more than just women.

A woman who was one of the first to enroll very recently made partner. She is the first woman in our firm to make partner who was part-time for a period of time. When I was growing up in the profession, I was told that was a taboo: You can't go part-time and expect to make partner.

Did your gender impact you in either science or law?

To be successful in a male-dominated world, in my view, required me to certainly take on a very gender-neutral manner but keep my personality. My personality tends to be much more collaborative than many men who I've known. I brought that into my practice and how I interacted with people in the legal profession, and I think that helps me. Rather than being threatening to men, they would accept my expertise without feeling like I was trying to step on their toes.

Why have you pushed to get women elevated?

I think women in firms are an advantage and an asset for any law firm, whether the firm realizes it or not. Clients want smart, capable women lawyers and diverse people of all kinds to be part of the teams that advise them. Our focus is to create teams and have personnel on board who are smart, capable and represent our community, and that means being diverse.

--Editing by Emily Kokoll.