

# Schwabe

## Women are making strides in healthcare law

Leadership and advocacy by peers help professionals in both industries break down barriers

As part of the Portland Business Journal's Executive Insights series, PBJ Market President and Publisher Candace Beeke spoke with Anne Talcott, shareholder with Schwabe, Williamson & Wyatt about advancing women in health care and law.

As the leader of Schwabe health care and life sciences industry group, Anne guides lawyers across three states and various practice groups in serving health care and biotech clients. With over 28 years of experience, she represents national and regional health care providers as well as some of the largest pharmaceutical, medical device and biologic manufacturers and distributors worldwide.

**CANDACE BEEKE: How did you come to working with health care and life sciences clients?**

**ANNE TALCOTT:** I took a lot of science classes as an undergraduate at UC San Diego. I eventually pivoted to political science and economics, but retained a deep interest and curiosity in the sciences. When I came to Schwabe, I was drawn to this practice group because of the science focus. It was also, coincidentally, the practice group with the most women partners. There were three, and in the mid-'90s, that was unheard of, both at Schwabe and nationally. I saw them as role models with careers I could attain someday.

**BEEKE: What have been the biggest challenges?**

**TALCOTT:** Any woman who's been practicing for almost 30 years has encountered biases — challenges within the firm, judges, opposing counsel and even clients who, over time, have come to understand that a female lawyer is just as competent as a male. That was not true when I started practicing.

But what's more important are the challenges the industry has been facing in the last five years with COVID and the pressures employees in health care have experienced being frontline workers; the pressures of practitioners at all levels deciding to leave the field after the pandemic. And now, nationally, the regulatory changes impacting funding for research in life sciences, the coming changes to Medicare, and finally, what's happening to the workforce with immigration at all levels. The health care and life science industries are facing crises like they've not seen before.

**BEEKE: Did you have a mentor? If so, what was their role? How did that help you?**

**TALCOTT:** I worked with three strong, successful female partners from the day I started. They gave me the ability to see I could do this job and represent clients at a high level. But my strongest mentor and promoter was a conservative white male partner at Schwabe. I practiced with him until he retired a couple of years ago. He had confidence in me and gave me the space to grow, including enough latitude to succeed and sometimes to fail. And he helped pick me up when I did make mistakes. Young lawyers need to remember it's called a "practice of law" because there's always going to be growth. This mentor helped me learn from my mistakes. Long before he retired, he already had in mind transitioning his practice. That's the biggest show of confidence an attorney can give — the willingness to turn their clients over.

**BEEKE: How have you seen organizational support for women attorneys change?**

**TALCOTT:** Thirty years ago there was almost no organizational support for women attorneys. The attitude back then was, you were lucky if you got that one single spot for a woman, and you should just be happy to be here. I, at least, had the women I practiced with who were ahead of me, breaking down some barriers. So I had more latitude to be myself, to understand that I could be a parent and practice at Schwabe, but it still was a struggle.

About 20 years ago, Schwabe realized that although we were hiring the best and the brightest lawyers, who, coincidentally, were primarily women, we were not retaining women at the same rate that we were retaining men. We were not losing them to other law firms, but either to our clients or they were leaving the practice of law completely.

So Schwabe formed our Women's Initiative, which has multiple purposes. An important one is bringing women together, because we found that our women don't tend to come together as organically as our male attorneys do. But Schwabe's Women's Initiative also has a more important business purpose, which is to pay attention to the training and advancement of women within the firm, and to succession planning when lawyers retire, to ensure that women attorneys inherit books of business to the same extent as their male counterparts.

Our women's initiative has been a huge organizational boost for women at the firm. Today, Schwabe is very strongly led

by women. We have a female CEO. Our board of directors is 60% women. Half our department heads are women, and our industry group leaders, are (about) 35% women.

**BEEKE: What is your advice to young women attorneys interested in health care and life sciences?**

**TALCOTT:** It's an exciting industry to be in right now, one where you need to continue to learn because things are constantly evolving, both with science and regulatory changes.

And remember it's a marathon, not a sprint. There will be peaks and valleys, and sometimes a detour, and that's OK. You cannot map it out completely and think it will be a straight road. But you learn from those valleys, as much as from the peaks. And the detours may bring you to a deeper passion.

My final bit of advice is the idea of work-life balance. Some days will be in balance. Other days, I will be focusing more on my career than on my family, and sometimes my family needs to be the most important. Let go of the idea that everything will always be in balance. Give yourself a little grace and understand it's going to be OK. As long as you communicate at home and at the office, it can be done.



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**ANNE TALCOTT**