
MOMMY ESQ. REPLACES MOMMY TRACKING WITH CAREER ADVANCEMENT

by LAUREN E. GROCHOW and DANA M. HEYDE



When women support each other, we do amazing things. Last year, Dana Heyde brought that mantra to Mommy Esq., an Orange County Bar Association Committee, when she started her first year as Co-Chair. The mantra aptly describes the essence of this dynamic group. In 2023, Mommy Esq. celebrated its ten-year anniversary! The longevity of the Committee is a testament to the power of women pulling each other up, instead of tearing each other down. The impacts of this powerful Committee are evident in the way so many Mommy members have excelled in life and in the legal profession.

The most exciting accolade Mommy Esq. boasts is the number of members who have gone on to be judicial officers. The Honorable Michelle Bell, Tania Vallejo, and Ami Sagel are a few alumni with this distinction. Last year, Judge Vallejo's MCLE discussion on How To Be A Judge was so impactful that it inspired Ami Sagel to finish her judicial application and her appointment wasn't far behind.

Of course, not all Mommy Esq. mentorship results in a judicial appointment. But quite often the mentorship and programs help members to excel in daily professional life. Mommy Esq. magically attracts women genuinely interested in building lasting friendships, referral partnerships, and mentorships with other mom attorneys. The advice, friendship, and mentorship between members is instant, and the impacts are lasting.

As a new Mommy Esq. member in 2017, Dana immediately saw the genuine camaraderie between the members. With a newborn at home, Dana was shocked when Erin Giglia, a Mommy Esq. member with two children, offered her sage advice about relinquishing "mom guilt" for attending that evening's networking event. Attorney moms don't normally admit to having "mom guilt" and instead present that they don't mind missing school functions or bedtime to meet their billable hour requirement. Erin's honesty shows how the Mommy Esq. members strive to keep things real with each other. Erin knew how important it would be to encourage a new mom to participate in professional social events, instead of feeling pressured to always be home with an infant. Dana already recognized the importance of networking, but it was Erin's encouragement that propelled her to make time for these nighttime events guilt-free, just like dad attorneys do. Having another woman recognize the mom guilt struggle, and then give permission to "get

over it" was an impactful moment. The result was instant!

Dana packed her mom guilt away when she became an active member of both Mommy Esq. and the Orange County Women Lawyers Association, attending events and even moderating the monthly OCWLA Book Club. Dana jumped at the chance to be the 2022 OCWLA President and 2023-2024 Mommy Esq. Co-Chair in the hope that she continue to foster a culture where women thrive with the support of other female attorneys.

Coming full circle, at the March Mommy Esq. meeting, the topic naturally arose of how


The advice,
friendship,
and mentorship
between members
is instant,
and the impacts
are lasting.

a mom attorney can do it all. More than one member admitted to having "mom guilt." Dana was the first to start the conversation by recognizing the guilt is shared by many members, and then encouraging the women present to recognize that they have the license to "do what you gotta do."

Lauren Grochow also found a professional community in Mommy Esq. In early 2022, when she launched her law firm, Mommy Esq. became a resource to her as she connected with other women who ran their own firms, including Dana Heyde. It was refreshing to be able to collaborate with other Mommy Esq. entrepreneurs to work through the struggles

of running a firm while raising children.

Eventually, Lauren was given the opportunity to present to Mommy Esq., along with Shirin Forootan, on starting a law practice. In true Mommy Esq. fashion, the presentation led to more connections in the OCBA community as Lauren met other amazing lawyer moms who were exploring launching their own firms and reached out to her for coffee and conversation. These connections have turned into friendships. For example, when Morgan Podruski first launched her firm, she attended Lauren and Shirin's presentation and connected with Lauren for coffee. Lauren and Morgan quickly realized they live close to each other, have similar age children, and both practice employee-side employment law. Morgan was able to find an office space next to Lauren, allowing not only for collaboration on legal work, but also support raising their young kids. It's not uncommon to see their boys drawing racetracks at the office. Lauren has even joined Morgan's Jiu Jitsu gym. Where else can working mom professionals connect on such a level?

These are just a few examples of the sense of community available to members of Mommy Esq. And sometimes that community helps hard-working lawyer moms to know we are not alone, and that we can help each other reach new levels of success. 

Lauren E. Grochow is Owner of Grochow Law, APC, a firm representing Employees Wronged by Employers. She can be reached at lauren@grochowlaw.com.

Dana M. Heyde is a partner at Cottle Keen Lopiccolo & Heyde, LLP, focusing on Estate Planning and Trust Litigation. She is 2023-24 Co-Chair of OCBA Committee Mommy Esq., 2023 President of the Orange County Women Lawyers Foundation, and the Immediate Past-President of the Orange County Women Lawyers Association. She can be reached at dana@cckhlaw.com.

This article first appeared in Orange County Lawyer, July 2024 (Vol. 66 No. 7), p. 28. The views expressed herein are those of the author. They do not necessarily represent the views of Orange County Lawyer magazine, the Orange County Bar Association, the Orange County Bar Association Charitable Fund, or their staffs, contributors, or advertisers. All legal and other issues must be independently researched.