

LAW WEEK COLORADO



Elizabeth Wylie Snell & Wilmer

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Lawyers Of The Year

JESSICA FOLKER LAW WEEK COLORADO

Elizabeth Wylie is on a mission to help women make what they're worth.

Earlier this year, the Snell & Wilmer partner teamed up with businesswoman and friend Diana Mead to launch an education campaign to teach negotiating skills to professional women.

The workshops were inspired by Colorado's Equal Pay for Equal Work Act, which went into effect in May, as well as the attention the #MeToo movement has brought to women's work conditions.

“There are not very many workshops out there to teach women how to negotiate their salaries, and it's an area where many women don't feel comfortable,” Wylie said.

The pair teamed up with the Colorado Women's Foundation and the Colorado Women's Bar Association to hold the first workshops over the summer. Wylie said they will be working with the Colorado Women's Chamber of Commerce and the Junior League of Denver to continue the presentations in 2020.

They try to keep the workshops to an hour, she said, but “overwhelming” audience participation has stretched the program longer, often up to two hours.

Wylie said there has been lots of positive feedback already, including partners in Denver law firms who have used her negotiation tactics to negotiate their salaries. While lawyers generally have some negotiation skills, “we don't

always use them for ourselves,” she said. “Empowering women to use those negotiation skills that they have, and then also introducing them to new tactics, has been very well received,” she said.

The initiative was also inspired by Wylie's own experience in the legal industry. She noticed few women in senior roles and a high attrition rate among female attorneys.

“I didn't have a lot of role models early on in my career in terms of women,” Wylie said. “Most of my mentors — in fact, all my mentors, thinking back — were men. And I'm very grateful to them, but I also would have benefited from that perspective.”

“Retaining women in the workforce is a big issue, and I think pay equity is an important piece of that retention issue,” she added.

To help women bargain with their bosses, she draws on her experience as a corporate and employment litigation attorney. While the workshops are meant for workers, she represents employers in her day job.

But she doesn't think the two sides are completely at odds.

“It seems like a contradiction, but it's actually not, because employers — my clients — they want to do the right thing,” Wylie said. “And more than that, they want to have good worker retention. They want to have a diverse workplace. They want to have a variety of perspectives. They want women to excel.”

Wylie advises clients on compliance with equal pay laws and how to conduct pay audits,

correct discrepancies and, ultimately, avoid litigation. She has special expertise in enforcing non-compete agreements and protecting trade secrets. Employers nationwide have seen major changes in their ability to enforce non-competes, Wylie said, and she spends “a fair amount of time” presenting on the topic to clients and other attorneys to help them stay on top of changes in the law.

One of Wylie's biggest accomplishments of the year was her transition to Snell & Wilmer in June from a smaller firm. She said the move has allowed her to take advantage of Snell & Wilmer's network of more than 400 attorneys across the West and Southwest and expand her practice into other areas of the law, such as M&A-related employment issues.

“It was time for me to go to a bigger platform, and finding the right one was an endeavor that I took very seriously,” she said. “I think I did find the right platform and the right fit for me and for my clients.”

Wylie's other notable accomplishments in 2019 included resolution of a client's trade secrets case on appeal following a six-day bench trial and being named one of “100 Women Who Inspire Us” by the ABA.

Changes in employment law in the past year have provided Wylie ample opportunity to share her expertise with the legal community and the public. She has spoken about the Equal Pay for Equal Work Act, Colorado's “ban the box” law and changes to EEO-1 pay reporting guidelines at legal conferences and to the

media, including Law Week.

As a college student, Wylie thought about becoming a journalist. But as a member of a family with three generations of lawyers — her grandfather, father, and brother were all attorneys — she saw how she could apply her writing skills and approach topics creatively within the legal profession.

“That's what I still enjoy about it most. I love being creative and working with my clients to find a different way to view a situation,” she said. As for how the Texas native ended up practicing in Colorado, she said, “That was a negotiation that I lost.”

“My husband and I decided to move from Dallas, where we had both grown up, and we just wanted to start something on our own,” said Wylie. “So, I said Hong Kong, and he said Seattle. And I said London, and he said Portland. And then I said San Francisco, and he said Denver, and I said I give up.” But, she added, “I do love living here. My children were raised here. I've been here 25 years. My community is here, and I love it.”

She sees her work on pay equity and advancing Colorado women's economic interests as a way to pair her legal expertise with community involvement.

“My work with organizations like the Women's Foundation and Colorado Women's Chamber of Commerce has enhanced my professional development immensely and made my career so much more rewarding.” •

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