

G&S Reflections: What does Women's History Month mean to Jaclyn Grodin?

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Throughout my career, I've been lucky enough to sit alongside some truly supportive, fearless, brilliant, and talented mentors, starting with Jennifer Furey, whom I met while I was still in law school and who hired me for my first legal job, and continuing through my time at the New York Attorney General's Office, where I had the chance to work with Jessica Clarke, the Chief of the Civil Rights Bureau, on an investigation and litigation arising out of the NYPD's response to the Summer 2020 social justice protests that gripped the country. The women in my professional life have pushed me forward to numerous successes – at trial, in depositions, arguing motions, securing injunctions, advancing to new jobs – no doubt. But as importantly – perhaps even more importantly – these women have allowed me the space to grow and develop on my own terms, given me agency to own my choices (the good ones and the bad), encouraged self-care before it became a pandemic buzzword, and showed me the kind of profound respect that too frequently escapes embrace in the legal profession. It is this unfettered support and gifts of empowerment that I hold most dear from my time thus far as an attorney, and which I try to recreate as I move up through the ranks.

Many professions, including mine, have a tendency to avoid the difficult conversations related to advancement and mental well-being in the name of the billable hour and business first (though there thankfully seem to be small cracks growing in that wall as we move through COVID-19). As we wind down to the last few days of Women's History Month, I am reminded of the importance of passing onto more junior women attorneys in my life the basic lessons that my own female mentors so generously shared with me over the course of my career; namely, give others the tools to succeed and share, and they will.

What are those tools? Luckily, we all have them readily available.

1. First, let women be leaders early in their careers, and they will be more likely to thrive and independently take on greater responsibilities as they develop. This could be taking the lead on a brief (even if it has to be rewritten), first chairing a deposition (even if many notes of missed questions are passed throughout), or joining a client call or meeting (even if silence is the only contribution). Feeling integral to the team early on is key to planting the seed that long-term success is not only possible, but probable.
2. Second, be flexible in appreciating how women want to develop their practices and structure their schedules. I truly believe that providing optionality is key to retaining talent, and

having choices as to what one's future career looks like is critical to understanding that you're working *towards* something, not just *for* someone else.

3.

Finally, try and understand when someone else may be having a difficult time, and make sure that you make yourself available to hear about those difficulties even when your own workload seems crushing. It's incredible how quickly and deeply women attorneys can internalize, and even more incredible how easily we can get caught up in our own careers that we lose sight of the importance of productively contributing to the careers of those around us.

Women's History Month also serves as an opportunity to reach out to the women mentors who have helped us, in ways big and small, get to where we are by showing us how much more we can always still achieve. I have some messages to write.