

MENTORS

APPRECIATIONS OF GUIDANCE & SUPPORT

Legal professionals write about their mentors

James McManis

McMANIS FAULKNER

Elevating women in law has been a focus of countless professional organizations and law firms during the past decade. Through my active role in California Women Lawyers, I have attended, organized, presented and moderated multiple programs on succeeding in this male-dominated industry. Many stress the need for women to find a mentor — a message often interpreted to suggest a same-sex mentor.

I suggest that if you want to join the “good ol’ boys” club, as law firms have been called, then find a “good ol’ boy” to help get you in. This, of course, does not take away from the importance of raising a new generation of women mentors and encouraging influential women leaders to continue mentoring those coming up in the ranks. The reality, however, is that the ratio between men and women in key law firm leadership positions remains woefully disproportionate.

I met Jim McManis while working as a manager/hostess/marketer at my family’s restaurant, I Gatti, in Los Gatos, some 16 years ago.

I was immediately struck by Jim’s sense of humor and his genuine interest in my future plans for law school (I’d taken a deferred entrance to help launch our family business). I learned that Jim loves being a lawyer, and he takes a great interest in those embarking on the same journey he started many years ago. Over lunches and dinners (and, unlike most legal recruiting meals, I was not sitting across the table), he encouraged me to get to law school and keep him posted on my progress. Indeed, Jim’s mentoring began even before I took my first class.

Upon completing law school, passing the bar and joining the firm, I quickly realized I was not the only person to enjoy Jim’s advice and guidance. Jim McManis and Bill Faulkner built an entire firm around highly diverse individuals — individuals who bore little, if any, resemblance to them, but whom they were ably mentoring. It wasn’t just women, but people from different ethnic, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds.

I made partner at 35 and now serve as chief legal officer, a position created for me based on my business skills and substantial trial experience, gained while collaborating with Jim on cases and earning his respect and trust while seated in the “second chair.” I then proved myself by flying solo and winning cases as the “first chair.” Much of the confidence needed to accomplish those successes came from knowing that no matter the outcome, Jim was in my corner.

A good mentor takes an interest in your career, gets to know



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your skills and helps you leverage your strengths and build on your unique talents, opening doors that might not otherwise be opened. While, conceptually, it may seem advantageous to have a woman mentor, who knows which tools will chip away at the glass ceiling, I submit that it may be just as advantageous to have a mentor who encourages you to simply shoot for the stars, without worrying about the ceiling.

— Neda Mansoorian, McManis Faulkner