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## IP Practices Nurture Women With Science Backgrounds

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Karen Boyd, partner at Fish & Richardson  
Image: Jason Doiy / The Recorder

Judith Hasko was working as a research scientist at the cardiovascular research department at Genentech when she thought of becoming a lawyer. At the time, Hasko, who has an undergraduate degree in biopsychology and a master's in neurobiology, had all but committed to pursue a Ph.D. -- but she went to law school instead.

"I was fascinated with science and research, but I also like to write and communicate, and I got really interested in the business side of biotechnology at Genentech," Hasko said. "I saw that the lawyers are the ones helping to commercialize a lot of our research, and I thought it would be a good position

to still pursue my interest in biology and *do* something for a change."

Today, Hasko is a partner in Latham & Watkins' bustling 44-partner biotech practice group. As one of only a few corporate attorneys with advanced science degrees, Hasko has become a sought-after talent. Latham recently wooed her from Cooley Godward, where she made partner six years after law school.

There has been a growing concern among law firms that women lawyers are leaving in greater numbers than men, leaving fewer in the partnership pool. But those women who have deep scientific backgrounds like Hasko appear to be the exception. They not only stay in firms but thrive, finding success in the form of partnerships and peer recognition.

"If you have the right experience and the right skills set, there are multiple opportunities to stand out in this industry," Hasko said.

A large chunk of the female partners at some firms are biotech and life-science attorneys. Of the 46 women who are partners at Boston-based Ropes & Gray, 18 are biotech and life-science partners. The firm's biotech and life-science practice, around 60 attorneys with 24 male partners, mostly came through its recent merger with New York IP firm Fish & Neave.

At 379-lawyer Fish & Richardson, 11 of the 35 women partners are from the IP firm's biotech and life-science practice. The group has about 85 attorneys. And out of the 24 female partners at Finnegan, Henderson, Farabow, Garrett & Dunner, 11 are from its biotech and life-science practice, which has about 123 attorneys.

### HOSPITABLE CLIMATE

For decades, biology was considered more woman-friendly than so-called harder sciences, like engineering and physics. "The climate was more welcoming to women in the biological field than in the physical sciences," said Denise Loring, co-head of Ropes & Gray's IP litigation department, who holds a master's degree in molecular biology.

But because of the constant scramble for research funds, many women were driven out of the lab and into law, according to Katharine Patterson, who has been a legal recruiter and consultant for IP practices for 25 years.

"Law has provided a haven for scientific women," Patterson said. "And their success disproves the theory that women can't succeed in law firms because they can't do the work. Given the right incentives, women would work as hard as men."

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Indeed, conversations with a handful of successful biotech and life-science attorneys provide a glimpse at why some women stay and succeed in law firms despite the difficulty of juggling work and family life.

Many of nearly a dozen women interviewed by *The Recorder* say they put up with the long hours and punishing workload because they feel they're given enough financial and professional incentives.

Many of the women interviewed said their scientific background gave them opportunities early in their careers that were not open to other junior attorneys, including direct client contact and close interaction with senior partners. Many found mentors who took great interest in their careers and gave them more opportunities. And all said they feel professionally rewarded because their contributions, in a red-hot practice area, are recognized by colleagues.

A 2001 study of top law school graduates by think tank Catalyst found that while women struggle with work-family obligations, the biggest reason women lawyers leave a firm is because they are dissatisfied with the work itself or feel stalled in their careers.

All of the women in that study cited "interesting" and "important" work as a primary reason they keep doing what they're doing.

"You really have to be passionate about what you're doing and feel that your work is valued by the firm to give you an incentive to make it work," said Lisa Haile, co-chairwoman of DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary's life-sciences practice.

At law firms with strong biotech and life-science practices, women with scientific backgrounds play lead roles in legal practice and in firm management.

At Morrison & Foerster, where biotech has become a centerpiece of the firm's corporate and litigation practices, a succession of women with Ph.D.s have co-chaired the firm's 300-lawyer IP practice group in the last several years.

MoFo partner Catherine Polizzi, now the co-chairwoman of the IP practice group, holds a Ph.D. in molecular biology and biochemistry. Her predecessor, Gladys Monroy, also has a Ph.D. and co-chaired the firm's IP group for several years.

Polizzi has been with MoFo since graduating from law school in 1994. She said that in all her time practicing, she has never felt that her gender could be an impediment to her advancement within the firm.

"Whether you're a man or a woman or a gremlin, in biotech it's your skills and experience that is important," Polizzi said.

## **FOLLOWING THE MONEY**

The stature of women specialists in the field has also been enhanced by the fact that biotechnology and life-science practices have been driving profits at many law firms. And because most litigation in the biotech arena focuses on companies' intellectual property portfolios, lawyers who understand the science behind the technology have become a precious resource.

Karen Boyd, a litigation partner at Fish & Richardson in Silicon Valley, found that her master's degree in molecular, cellular and developmental biology made clients comfortable enough to trust her with big cases. She got her first chance to manage a case when she was a third-year associate.

"I don't think I would have had a chance at handling my first case that early if I didn't have my technical background," Boyd said.

The fact that law firms rely on their scientifically trained attorneys to interact with clients also adds to their importance.

"A lot of times, law firms hire lawyers with Ph.D.s not because of their legal experience," said Haile, a former research scientist with a doctorate in microbiology and immunology. "I feel that the opportunities that my scientific background gave me have accelerated my career advancement."

## **WOMEN'S CLUB?**

Another plus for women biotech attorneys is the disproportionate number of women outside counsel in the industry. Although many women attorneys don't believe that having in-house women counsel doing the hiring gives them an advantage, it at least levels the playing field, they said.

"It makes gender not a factor, and that's very nice," said Vicki Veenker, founder of Shearman & Sterling's Silicon Valley intellectual property practice and biotech group.

The high number of biotech women partners in law firms has attracted even more women to the field and has kept many working at firms, said Patterson, the legal recruiter. Most of the women interviewed by *The Recorder* were recruited by female partners and say their careers have benefited a lot from close mentoring.

Polizzi says she was befriended and later recruited by Monroy while she was still working as a research scientist.

"It was encouraging to have someone take interest in you like that," Polizzi said.

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But in the end, Polizzi said, one overriding reason many female biotech attorneys tend to stay in the practice is their deep interest in science and the belief that they are doing something that benefits society.

"For those of us who love science, what drives us is that we are helping scientists bring new discoveries to market and in a way help in alleviating suffering or cure diseases," Polizzi said. "That to me is what makes my job dynamic and fulfilling."