



# Connecting Women Lawyers



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**This is the last PDF version  
of the WLF Newsletter.  
Look out for a new web  
version later this year.**

## Remarks of the Chair

By Sara Li

While preparing these remarks, I took the opportunity to reflect on my journey with the Women Lawyers Forum (WLF). While in law school, I was introduced to the WLF by lucky happenstance. As a mentee in the CBABC's student mentorship program, I had been looking forward to meeting my mentor at the program's first event. When he was unable to attend, a senior female crown counsel graciously "adopted" me along with a small collection of other students. Despite not being my assigned mentor, she kept in touch and encouraged me to attend WLF events. As it turns out, Carol Anne was the Chair of the WLF at the time and her generosity, kindness and collegiality were a sign of things to come. My experience in the WLF community has been all this and more. Over the years, what I give and receive from the WLF has evolved, but it has always remained a place where I can find exactly what I need, whether it is to commiserate, to celebrate achievements or to find understanding and support.



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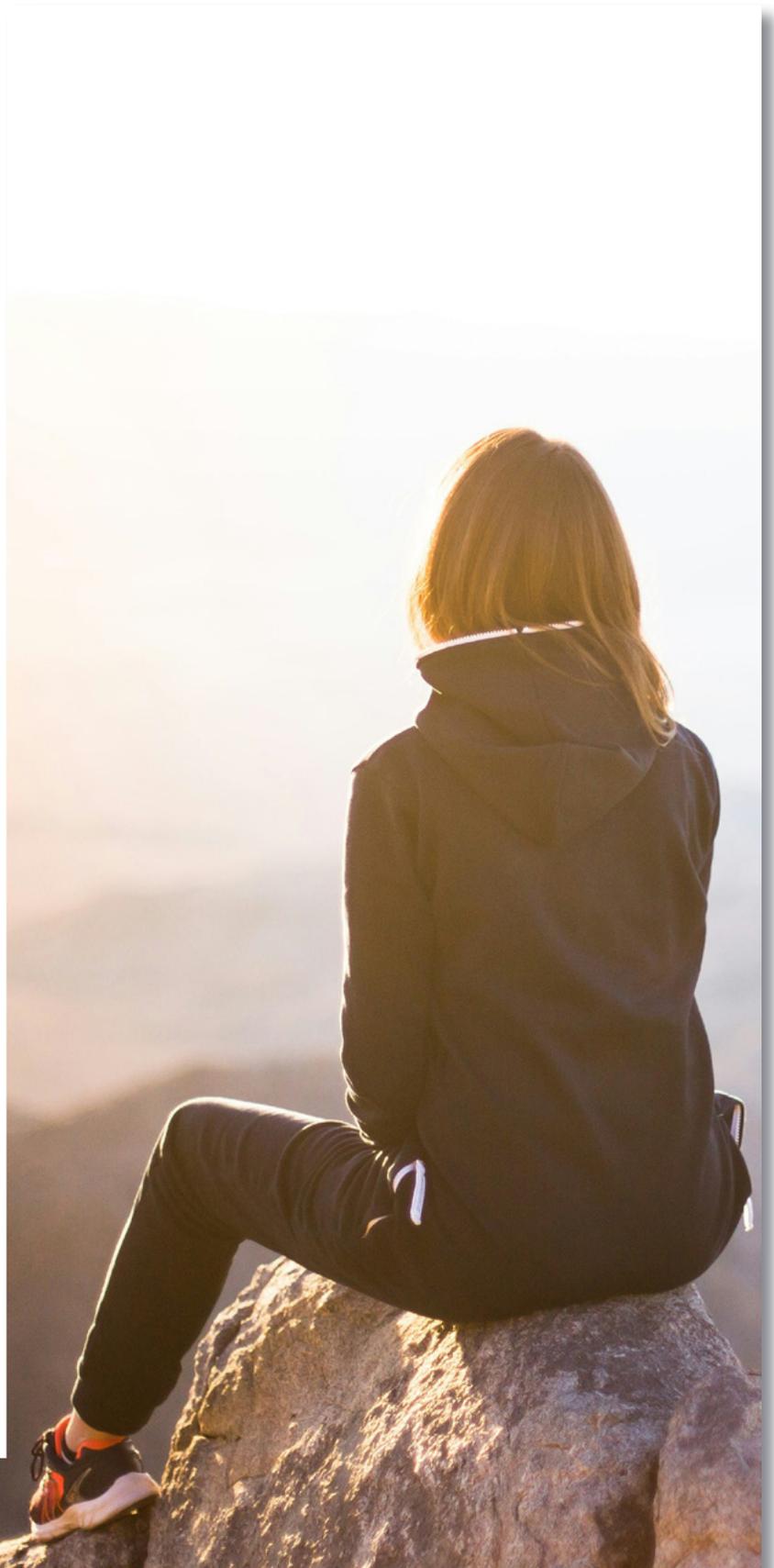


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In a demanding profession like law, support from your colleagues can be a lifeline. Many of you may remember the [2022 National Study on Wellness in the Legal Profession](#), which highlighted the concerning state of mental health within the Canadian legal community. The study revealed 63% of women legal professionals were experiencing psychological distress. In other words, nearly two out of three of us are dealing with a range of physical, psychological and behavioral symptoms such as fatigue, irritability, anxiety or insomnia, that can resemble depression or burnout.

However, the study also identified key protective factors, which included support from colleagues. [Phase II](#) of the study, which was recently released with province-specific qualitative data and recommendations, further emphasized this point. The report for B.C. noted “social support is associated with significantly lower psychological distress, as well as higher affective commitment to the profession and reduced intention to leave.” Social support is key to retaining women lawyers in the profession.

Therefore, I encourage you, even amid increasingly busy schedules, to prioritize reconnecting with colleagues, mentors and mentees this year, whether at a WLF event or over a simple coffee. The essence of the WLF isn't in our events, our robust mentorship program or even grand ideals. Though all these things are both amazing and vital to the WLF, they exist for you—the lawyers who, by supporting and connecting with one another, create the community that will ultimately make our profession a better place for all.





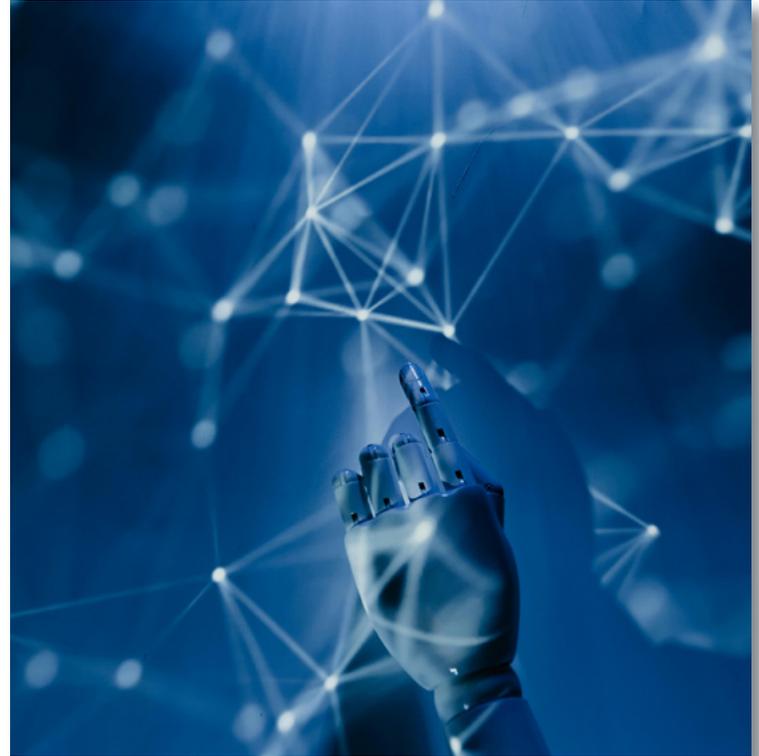
## Using Artificial Intelligence to Improve Work-Life Balance for Women Lawyers

By Munpreet Sandhu

It is no surprise that the legal profession can be demanding, and balancing professional excellence with personal responsibilities often leads to high levels of stress and burnout. Women lawyers face unique challenges, from managing caregiving responsibilities to breaking through gender barriers in a male-dominated field. As the legal landscape evolves, artificial intelligence (AI) may provide an opportunity to help ease some of these pressures, offering tools that can streamline workflow, improve time management and reduce burnout.

### Reducing Time-Consuming Tasks

Burnout is a significant issue for women lawyers, many of whom are navigating heavy workloads while also managing caregiver or household responsibilities. By using AI to handle routine tasks, women lawyers can focus on higher-level work, professional development or simply spend more time with family.



For example, LexisNexis's Lexis+ uses advanced AI algorithms to speed up legal research by combing through vast databases of case law, statutes, and legal texts. This means women lawyers can access and analyze the necessary information more quickly, freeing up time for other important activities like client meetings, family time, or self-care. Similarly, ChatGPT can assist in refining documents and creating summaries, which can traditionally consume hours of a lawyer's day.

For women lawyers balancing high caseloads and family obligations, these AI-driven tools may increase productivity and improve work-life balance by reducing administrative burdens.

### Professional Responsibility

AI's potential to reshape legal practice is promising, and for women lawyers, it offers a path to achieving a better work-life balance. However, as AI becomes an integral part of legal practice, women lawyers must also ensure that they receive the proper training to use AI ethically and responsibly.

The Law Society of British Columbia has provided guidance regarding professional responsibility and generative AI - including an emphasis that lawyers must oversee AI's role in legal work, ensuring it doesn't provide incorrect case law or introduce errors.<sup>1</sup>

When used properly and responsibly, AI can be a fantastic tool to help women lawyers take back time that can be better spent on career advancement and personal well-being.

1. Law Society of British Columbia, ["Practice Resource: Guidance on Professional Responsibility and Generative AI"](#) October 2023.



## Reimagining Work-Life Balance in a Post-Pandemic World

By Maxine Blennerhassett

In recent months, law firms and other workplaces have increasingly scaled back remote work policies in the post-COVID landscape, whether through mandatory in-office requirements or gradual adjustments to hybrid arrangements. However, this shift has resulted in mixed feelings. For many, the return signals a welcome shift to normalcy, but for others, the change raises unique challenges. For women lawyers, who often juggle career demands with responsibilities at home, the transition may feel especially demanding.

Mandatory office time often means revisiting the complex logistics of balancing professional obligations with caregiving responsibilities. Working mothers may now need to navigate daycare pickups, school drop-offs and other demands that remote work had helped accommodate. Similarly, women who care for elderly family members or support relatives with disabilities face renewed challenges in managing their dual roles. This transition can create emotional and mental stress, as juggling multiple responsibilities often leads to feelings of guilt or inadequacy on both fronts.

In the face of these challenges, here are some strategies that may help manage the return to in-office work while maintaining balance.

**Discuss Flexible Options with Your Employer:** Many firms may remain open to hybrid work arrangements or staggered schedules. Start a conversation with your firm about the possibility of retaining some flexibility. Frame the request around productivity and job satisfaction rather than personal convenience. Highlight how, with a hybrid model, you can bring more focus and energy to your legal work.

**Lean on Your Support Network:** Reach out to colleagues, friends or family who may be facing similar struggles. Sharing childcare resources, coordinating school pick-ups or simply having a sounding board can help alleviate some of the burden. Consider creating a network of colleagues at your firm or within the legal community to exchange ideas, tips and even support systems for balancing work and home.

**Explore Available Resources:** Many firms or communities offer support services, such as childcare assistance programs or flexible caregiving leave. Take the time to research options that could help ease your responsibilities and do not hesitate to consult HR for guidance. Additionally, programs like the Lawyers Assistance Program provide valuable resources, including counseling, workshops, career coaching and training sessions.

**Practice Self-Advocacy:** Now, more than ever, self-advocacy is essential. Recognize that your needs are valid and confidently advocate for flexibility. While asking for accommodations, emphasize how these adjustments enable you to stay engaged, committed and effective. Knowing your worth and expressing it confidently can often open doors to more workable arrangements.

While the return to in-office work presents new challenges, it also offers an opportunity for women in law to reshape how work is defined. By advocating for themselves, utilizing support systems and setting clear boundaries, women can ensure their voices are heard while preventing burnout. Together, we can use this transition period to inspire a more balanced and inclusive future for the profession—one that recognizes the importance of flexibility and the need to support women in all aspects of their lives.





## Fall Launch Event: Speaker Spotlight

By Pavneet Grewal

On the evening of September 17, 2024, Clark Wilson LLP hosted the WLF Fall Launch Event. The evening started with canapes and connections, and concluded with inspiration from our four accomplished panelists: Deborah (Deb) Viccars, Dimple Kainth, Jeevyn Dhaliwal, K.C., and Judge Sheryl Wagner. The panelists offered insight into their unique professional journeys. As a token of thanks, the WLF would like to shine a spotlight on each of our panelists' achievements.

### Deb Viccars

Deb Viccars is the Executive Vice President of Policy, Strategy & Legal Affairs at Doctors of BC. She has been with Doctors of BC for 11 years and is a leader in her field. After graduating from UBC Law School in 2000, Deb practiced corporate/commercial law at Edwards, Kenny & Bray and then spent eight years with WorkSafe BC. She is an entrepreneur at heart and has co-owned various successful businesses. Deb finds her greatest joy in mentoring and sharing her experiences with others, aiming to give them confidence. Outside of her professional endeavors, Deb enjoys spending time with her husband and their two teenage children.



### Dimple Kainth

Dimple Kainth is a sole-practitioner and the principal of Satya Law. She is former in-house counsel with the Law Society of BC and currently works with lawyers and law firms on various matters, including defending allegations of professional misconduct. Dimple is also the principal of Sayva Consulting where she provides consulting services to lawyers and law firms on ethics and practice management issues. She helps them improve efficiently to reduce the risk of negligence claims and regulatory interference. She also provides consulting services to law firms regarding mentorship and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

### Jeevyn Dhaliwal, K.C.

Jeevyn Dhaliwal, K.C., is the 2024 President of the Law Society of British Columbia. Her volunteer activities within the profession are numerous, including serving as a longstanding board member and past President of the South Asian Bar Association, as well as an elected member of the Vancouver Bar Association Board of Directors and CBABC Provincial Council. Jeevyn has a wide range of employment law experience and currently focuses her practice on workplace immigration matters. Her community endeavors include service as a Director with Creative BC, Instructor with Capilano University's Legal Studies Department and ongoing involvement with the UBC Alumni Association.

### Honourable Judge Sheryl Wagner

Judge Wagner graduated from the University of Alberta Faculty of Law in 1994. She then moved to British Columbia and articulated with a mid-sized firm in Vancouver. After articling, she worked in civil litigation for approximately 8 years, which included an 18-month period working as a mediator in Australia. In 2005, Judge Wagner became a Crown Prosecutor. She moved to the Special Prosecutions office in 2017 where she prosecuted many different serious criminal offences and participated in lengthy jury trials. In February 2024, she was appointed to the Provincial Court Bench. Judge Wagner has been a member of the mentorship programs offered through the YWCA for high school students in Vancouver and the WLF.



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## WLF Education: Self-Advocacy as a Woman Lawyer

By Leah Seneviratne

There is no shortage of challenges working as a lawyer. In particular, women lawyers continue to be underestimated. The challenge of building self-confidence and advocating for yourself in the workplace can be difficult to navigate without a proper support system.

On November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the Women Lawyers Forum hosted an educational discussion on self-advocacy for women lawyers. Diane Bell, K.C., Partner and Mediator at Clark Wilson, Lisa Andersen, Director of Legal Talent and Knowledge Management at Singleton Reynolds, and Michaela Krell, National Director at Life After Law, each shared their personal accounts and advice on advocating for one's career growth. This discussion was moderated by Catherine Ewasiuk, associate at Dentons and co-author of the CBABC's report on *Pay Equity in the Legal Profession* (2021).

Diane began the night speaking about the ideas of self-advocacy and assisted advocacy. She explained part of self-advocacy was not only doing excellent work, but also carving out a niche to make yourself more valuable within your workplace and being a "likeable badass" by balancing assertiveness and empathy. On the other hand, assisted advocacy involves seeking out mentors, including someone in your workplace who will support you and be your champion. Diane added if you want to step away and take leave, don't be afraid to do so, but keep in contact with the right people and maintain your knowledge base to make the transition back to the workplace easier.



Lisa spoke about the importance of knowing what you want and what your boundaries are, as part of self-advocacy is figuring out your strengths. When dealing with impostor syndrome, Lisa suggested seeking feedback from people you trust and giving yourself the benefit of the doubt where there is an absence of evidence to the contrary. Further, you should be learning from mistakes rather than letting them undermine your confidence. With respect to applications and new roles, Lisa added you shouldn't shy away from opportunities where you might not meet every bullet point on the job posting.

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Michaela provided helpful tips when considering a career change. She explained there may be drawbacks to jumping into an in-house position, and smaller firms or hybrid work models may be a better fit if you don't feel you're in the right place. In-house positions may still be a good fit for you, but make sure you're asking the right questions. Michaela echoed the adage, "the grass is greener where you water it." With respect to salary negotiations, Michaela added that you should remember your self-worth and merit, and don't shy away from asking for perks and consulting third parties who know the market.



This event was well-attended with great networking and a helpful post-discussion question period. Attendees left with a deeper understanding of how to be a better self-advocate as well as how to make others more comfortable to advocate for themselves. The WLF thanks all our speakers and attendees for an inspiring and educational evening.

[View the recording of this session.](#)

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### Attend the Senior Women Lawyers Dinner

Strengthen your professional connections and honour women who have paved the way for others. Watson Board Advisors Founder and CEO, **Elizabeth Watson, KC**, is the keynote speaker.

Wed, Feb 26 | 5:30pm | Water St. Cafe

[Register >](#)



## Stay Connected!

WLF-BC is open to all CBABC members. Learn more about joining at [cbabc.org/membership](http://cbabc.org/membership). To enroll in WLF, update your Sections at [cbabc.org/enroll](http://cbabc.org/enroll)

We hope you will join the Forum!

## Get Social!

Follow us on:

Twitter: [twitter.com/CBA\\_WLF](https://twitter.com/CBA_WLF)

Instagram: [instagram.com/cba\\_wlf](https://instagram.com/cba_wlf)

LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/showcase/cba-wlf](https://linkedin.com/showcase/cba-wlf) for all things WLF.

## Write Us

Are you interested in writing an article for the WLF BC Newsletter or do you have any comments or feedback? If so, please contact the BC WLF Marketing and Communications Committee Co-Chair: [Leah Seneviratne](mailto:Leah.Seneviratne).

## CBA National WLF Newsletter

CBA National WLF Newsletter - The Common Room is available at [cba.org/Sections/Women-Lawyers/Articles](http://cba.org/Sections/Women-Lawyers/Articles)

The CBA National WLF is seeking article for its newsletters. If you would like to contribute, please contact: [cbawomenlawyers@cba.org](mailto:cbawomenlawyers@cba.org).

## Save the date! WLF Gala to take place on April 10, 2025

By Kyla Lee

Exciting news: the CBABC Women Lawyers Forum Gala is just around the corner! This empowering event occurs once every two years bringing the legal profession together to connect, celebrate women leaders, mentors and rising stars in the profession, and gain insights from a distinguished speaker.



Mark your calendar for an unforgettable evening of inspiration and recognition on April 10, 2025 at the Fairmont Waterfront Hotel in Vancouver. This is an evening you won't want to miss.

This year, the WLF Gala is proud to host the Honourable Judge Marion Buller as the keynote speaker. She is a trailblazer in the legal profession as the first woman of First Nations descent appointed to the Provincial Court of British Columbia. She served as Chief Commissioner of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls from 2016 to 2019. Her impactful leadership and dedication to equity and reconciliation promise a thought-provoking and inspiring address. Don't miss this extraordinary opportunity to hear from a true pioneer in the profession.

Our last Gala event, in April 2023, was a resounding success. The WLF hosted the Gala at the Fairmont Waterfront Hotel in Vancouver, celebrating the achievements of women lawyers and honouring three outstanding women. Myrna McCallum received the WLF Award of Excellence for her groundbreaking work in trauma-informed lawyering, Cheryl D'Sa, K.C. was awarded the Debra Van Ginkel, Q.C. Mentoring Award for exceptional contributions as a mentor and Julia Lockhart was recognized with the Rising Star Award. The event, featuring the Honourable Nikki Sharma, Attorney General of BC as the keynote speaker, marked a triumphant return to our Gala post-COVID, fostering greater connections and community among women lawyers in B.C.



Keep your eyes peeled in the coming weeks for further announcements including the Gala's theme, as well as opportunities for sponsorships.