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Keynote Speech by Indranee Rajah S. C. Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Second Minister for Finance and Education, at Law Society's Women in Practice Dialogue on 23 July 2019, at The Colonial at Scotts

Women Lawyers of Tomorrow – Pushing Base, Brand and Boundaries

Ms Felicia Tan, Co-chairperson, Women in Practice

Ladies and Gentlemen,

INTRODUCTION

1. It's a great pleasure to be here. Thank you for inviting me to today's event.
2. The Women in Practice (WIP) taskforce was formed in March 2018 by the Law Society to examine women-in-the-workplace issues in a move to address inequities in the legal industry.
3. I have always believed in the need for professional women to close gender gaps, so that they can not only advance in their careers but also achieve personal growth. This is very much in alignment with WIP's mission.
4. I had asked the Office for Women's Development – a division in the Ministry of Social and Family Development which focuses on gender issues at the national level – to work with WIP to identify issues women face in legal practice, provide a platform for the exchange of ideas on how to address these issues, and see what we can do to support each other. That was the impetus for today's event.
5. While women lawyers are doing well overall, there is still room for progress. For example, women make up half of law school undergraduates, and lawyers holding practising certificates, which is good. However, only about 30% of partners and directors (i.e. management) in Singapore law firms today are women. So, room for improvement there.
6. In developing the theme for today's event, we asked WIP what topics would be of interest to you. Areas of interest included professional advancement, technology and branding. I understand that you also wanted to know how you can take some of the things, which are typically regarded as “female weaknesses”, and turn these into strengths.
7. Hence today's theme, “Women Lawyers of Tomorrow – Pushing Base, Brand and Boundaries”, provides a useful frame within which to address these areas of interest.

PUSH YOUR BASE

8. First, push your base. The central core to being a lawyer (apart from integrity and values which for today's purposes I will take it as given) is legal knowledge. Your base knowledge is what you acquired in law school and from your professional training. But what you need to understand from the outset is that that was just the beginning.

9. From the day that you get called to the Bar, the rest of your life is about pushing your base in terms of acquiring deeper and greater legal knowledge. Law evolves with events and society, and you have to keep up.

10. This is one of those areas where you can turn perceived weakness to strength. One of the things which plagues many women and women lawyers – unless you happen to be an exception – is self-doubt. That sneaky feeling that creeps up on you, that somehow, no matter what you have achieved thus far, it may not be good enough. Because if you never had that feeling, that's fine. Some of you, like me, have experienced it, and you'll know what I'm talking about. If you feel that way, then use that as a motivation to push your knowledge base.

11. Make continuing legal profession a way of life from the very beginning. Identify the growth areas in which you want to specialise and pursue knowledge, skills and know-how in those areas relentlessly and from all sources.

12. Take infrastructure for example. We all know this is a growing area. People have been talking about it. But it is not taught as a distinct subject in law school. This is something that you are going to have to learn on the job. If you are a corporate lawyer, you will need to pick up project finance. If you are a disputes lawyer, you will have to start getting familiar with all the various infrastructure dispute models. If your firm is already doing this kind of work, then you will learn from other lawyers. If not, you have to seek out opportunities. So one example, there is the Infrastructure & Project Finance Qualification recently launched by the Institute of Singapore Chartered Accountants (ISCA) – that is the accountancy equivalent of Law Society. The Qualification course is open to members of other professions. The Professional Services Programme Office (PSPO), which is a government agency, has also worked with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), which is part of the World Bank family, for secondment opportunities for Singapore lawyers to work on legal aspects of infrastructure projects. So that is one way of growing your knowledge in project finance.

13. Another example would be the dispute resolution space. Singapore has also increasingly profiled and reinforced its status as the global hub for Alternative Dispute Resolution. On 7 August 2019, the Singapore Convention on Mediation will be signed here. Mediation is a growth area. Get yourselves qualified as mediators and build your skillsets in this area if you are in disputes. There is a huge scope for women lawyers in this field as women have natural soft skills and EQ, which are highly valued in mediation.

14. Also, build up your leadership skills. For those who are making the transition from associate or junior partners to equity, you should consider the SAL-INSEAD Law Firm Leadership Programme, because that is for preparing you to become a leader in your firm. It is one thing to be a lawyer and to have all the legal knowledge, it's quite another thing to run your firm as a business and that they don't teach you that in law school either. So that's one of the reasons why we have the SAL-INSEAD Programme.

PUSH YOUR BRAND

15. So that was pushing your base; now push your brand. You already have the skills and the knowledge, but that alone is not enough. You can be the brightest lawyer but if no one has heard of you, you aren't going to get very much work. So the next thing to do is push your brand.

16. What do I mean by this? Every professional should have a personal brand – something that sets you apart from your competition but which is quintessentially you, and by which you are identified. It is always easier to think of brands in terms of products, but how does it work for professionals? Perhaps the easiest examples are those who are in the show business. Take Beyoncé. Her core skillset (or her base) is singing and music. That's her core skill right? But her brand goes beyond that – it includes the whole look, women's empowerment, and also about celebrating the African-American heritage. That's the brand.

17. So how would it work in the professional context? You need to start with your core competencies. Pick the three or four things that you are good at, and which you can say are your characteristics and build around that. When I was in practice, my particular branding was that of a lawyer who could solve difficult and complex problems – or undoing Gordian knots – just something that I happened to like doing, solving

problems especially difficult ones. Solving did not always mean winning a case – though it always felt good when that happened! Solving also includes win-win settlements or compromises. That was important to clients, and that was my value proposition to them.

18. Once you have sorted out your brand, you have to actively make it known to others. This includes networking. This does not always come easily to women. Most of the time we just want to get on with the real work, and make sure things get done properly and on time. Asian women are traditionally taught and expected to be self-effacing and modest. As you can imagine, that can be a bit self-inhibiting when it comes to profiling yourself and networking.

19. Women are often accused of being perfectionists, but that's a good thing in my view. If you are a perfectionist, this is the time to draw on it. Use that desire to make things the best as they can be, to encourage you to build your personal brand and get out there and network. Get into conferences, speaking engagements and other relevant platforms to make your name known. Do customised presentations for clients and potential clients. Conduct seminars. Engage all the groups that are relevant to your area of practice.

PUSH YOUR BOUNDARIES

20. Third, push your boundaries. So, you've got your base. You've got your brand. But that's not the end of it. You have to push your boundaries.

21. For this, you can draw on the other qualities that women are known for – flexibility, adaptability, willingness to learn, resilience.

22. What are the boundaries you should push? The answer is that it very much depends on you and your circumstances. Different people have different thresholds and different limitations. So starting points are different. And that's ok. But what you really want to do, is to go beyond wherever you are at now and take the next step, so that you (and/or, if applicable, your organisation) can grow. A few months ago, wearing my MOE hat, I visited Haig Girls' School. I was inspired to learn that one of the things that the school teaches the girls is to have a "growth mindset", that is to always see how they can stretch themselves, how they can learn new things and handle new situations. Those girls are going to grow up well-equipped to handle a future in which change is a constant. I felt that that was a lesson for all of us, myself included.

23. While each individual will have to decide what your personal boundaries are and what you want to push, there are some common boundaries which women lawyers can and should push.

A. Embracing Technology.

24. First, technology. The digital transformation is taking the world by storm. Professional services are having to change and adapt in response to the disruption, which is forced upon it by technology. Audit software is taking over the traditional audit functions of accountants. Legal tech is taking over many of the functions which junior lawyers now spend many billable hours on. Market demand, cost drivers and client expectations will increasingly thrust technology on you. A study by the Law Society (LawSoc) and the Ministry of Law (Minlaw) showed that 85% of lawyers surveyed agreed that legal technology was crucial to the development of the profession, and 72% felt that there was a need to increase the level of technology adoption in their firms. So it's not a matter of if but when.

25. Therefore, to women lawyers I would say, grow by embracing technology. Make it work for you.

26. If you are already a pro, good for you. If you aren't on the tech train, hop on now. You can start small and build your way up.

27. For example, are you using social media for your professional branding? Start a legal blog, write thought pieces on LinkedIn, use reputable digital platforms to market your expertise. Consider doing TED-style talks using Google Hangout. Leverage technology to expand your reach, raise your profile, make contacts and get speaking engagements, all of which can translate to better opportunities and more work. The American Bar Tech Report 2018 showed that 79% of attorneys use social media for career development, out of which 82%

use LinkedIn and 47% use Facebook. 35% of the lawyers surveyed were rewarded with clients as a result.

28. Beyond social media, there's legal tech, which is essentially any technology that facilitates legal practice, improves productivity and reduces cost. The level of tech use you are exposed to and adopt will depend on your firms and your needs, but the point I want to make is simply that you need to make the effort to be personally invested in, and comfortable with using legal tech for your own and your firm's growth.

29. Do make use of government programmes to this end. Following on the success of Tech Start for Law, Ministry of Law, Law Society, Enterprise Singapore and Infocomm Media Development Authority launched the \$3.68 million "Tech-celerate for Law" programme on 2 May 2019 to help Singapore Law Practices adopt technology. Later this year, Workforce Singapore and LawSoc will be starting a programme to equip lawyers with skills for practising law in a digitalised environment, and for managing transformation and innovation.

B. Changing Corporate Culture

30. Next, changing corporate culture as part of pushing your boundaries. This is the second area in which you can push boundaries.

31. Very often, the main obstacle to change is mindset. As women lawyers, you can work together to change mindsets in areas important to you. One area in which working female professionals struggle is balancing work, family and personal time. How many times have you felt torn between your work commitments and needing to take time off to be with the family? Is your firm supportive – does it allow for flexibility in work – to take some time off to attend to family, on the understanding that you will still get the job done? Does it encourage you to clear your leave, so that you don't suffer from burn-out? Do you feel guilty or are you regarded as a slacker when you don't stay late even though you have cleared your work for the day? These issues have a lot to do with corporate culture.

32. As women lawyers, you can come together to address these. If you are in a leadership role, initiate the change. It's in your hands! If you are in junior positions, you could come together, and as a group, make proposals or suggestions to your bosses on what can be done to make a change for the better. For those who are worried about how your bosses will react, well, remember you are not just solicitors, you are also advocates. This is well within your skillsets! As you all know it's not just what you say, it's also how you say it. Make it a conversation, not a confrontation!

33. I have highlighted work life balance, but this approach applies to almost any other topic. Be the ones to make the change!

C. Going International

34. Third, push your geographical boundaries. Increasingly, our work is no longer purely domestic. This is more easily seen in our corporate commercial and dispute resolution work, with Singapore being an international hub for legal services. However, it also extends to areas like criminal and family law, which were previously regarded as purely domestic. Fraud, cybercrime, money laundering are just some examples of how crime has become transnational, and underscore the need for lawyers specialising in criminal law to have an international aspect to their practice. Likewise, marriages between spouses of differing nationalities and cultures, cross-border custody disputes and assets located in different jurisdictions have made family law international too.

35. So make a concerted effort to take your practice from domestic to international. Think about how to make your professional name abroad as well as home. Identify the international circuits, associations and networks that are useful to your practice and get into them.

36. LawSoc has collaborated with MinLaw and International Enterprise Singapore to develop a "Lawyers Go Global" programme, that connects Singapore legal expertise with global opportunities through overseas mission trips, training and branding and marketing under "The Singapore Lawyer" brand. Lawyers and law firms can participate in the programme. I would encourage you to participate to expand knowledge and your business networks.

D. Doing Pro Bono and Volunteering.

37. Fourth, push the areas in which you can make an impact. Being a lawyer is to be in a position of great privilege. Why do I say this?

38. Because you know the law. You have the keys to the frameworks on which society is built, you are able to navigate the court system which determines rights, liabilities and life consequences, and through advice and advocacy, you are guides and ushers who shed light for those who are lost in the mysterious maze of laws, rules and regulations.

39. This puts you in a position of incredible advantage. Recently, I spoke about how we want to tackle inequality by bridging shortfalls and narrowing gaps. One of the ways of doing this is for those in a position of advantage to share their knowledge and skills with those in need of them, but who cannot afford such services. Lawyers have much to contribute in this regard.

40. Thus for those of you who are not already doing so, do think about pro bono work. Volunteer at the legal clinics or with LAB or CLAS or SAWL. Or do any other kind of volunteer work where you think you can make a positive difference.

CONCLUSION

41. So let me conclude by thanking Law Society's Women in Practice Taskforce and the Office for Women's Development for putting this dialogue together, to give us all a platform to learn from one another and share ideas on pushing base, brand and boundaries for a better future for women lawyers of tomorrow. This sharing and networking platform is very valuable and important as part of your career development. I look forward to the conversation that we are going to have with yourselves, and the panelists made up of very many accomplished women in their fields. Thank you all very much. Published on : 23 Jul 2019