

JANE KEIR



In May 2013, Jane Keir, winner of the 2007 Woman of Achievement Legal Category Award and WIC Diamond Member becomes Senior Partner of Kingsley Napley, a leading City law firm.

We put Jane "In the Spotlight" to gain an insight into her world.

Why did you become a lawyer?

I knew, very early on in my career, that I wanted to specialise in divorce and family work as it offers enormous variety, can be very challenging and enables me to combine my communication, inter-personal and tactical skills.

What do you love about the job?

The people I meet – clients, family lawyers and members of the family bar and judiciary, as well as colleagues – and the fact that no two cases are ever the same.

What challenges did you face as you progressed in the profession and how did you overcome them?

The expectations upon young solicitors are very considerable as clients anticipate them having all the answers, even when they are newly qualified. Gaining confidence was very important for me but I had a great role model and mentor in Pamela Collis, then head of Kingsley Napley's family law practice, who helped me find my feet. I hope I have been able to mentor those after me in the same positive way.

Describe your responsibilities as Senior Partner.

I now have both an internal and external role. I will assist the Managing Partner, Linda Woolley in relation to any internal performance issues and act as a sounding board for colleagues with budding ideas or discuss any problems they may be encountering. Externally, I will seek to enhance Kingsley Napley's reputation with fellow professionals and seek to deliver further work referrals to all our specialist teams. I will also try to dispel myths about engaging with lawyers and will do my utmost to improve transparency, a common concern of users of legal services. I also encourage life-long relationships with our clients so that they trust us to help them with every major event in their life for which they need legal advice and support. These relationships with Kingsley Napley will see them through marriage, advice on adoption or surrogacy, setting up a business, hiring employees, facilitating visas for overseas employees, managing commercial disputes, preparing wills, ensuring an inheritance as well as real difficulties such as engaging with the criminal law process... the list goes on.

What is your vision for the firm?

To protect and enhance Kingsley Napley's reputation for excellence and further extend its reach, to individual and corporate clients – both UK and international, for the expert delivery of the specialist services that we provide.

What challenges do you see to achieving the vision?

Changes are occurring across the legal landscape with, for example, the development of Alternative Business Services (ABSs) offering cut-price but commoditised legal services. This actually presents an opportunity for Kingsley Napley to thrive – by demonstrating our commitment to a truly personalised service – emulating the relationships that clients once enjoyed with their bank manager, family GP and of course the family solicitor, but always rightfully with an eye on value. We are firm believers in treating our clients, corporate or individual, as people to whom we will be loyal and will support as they develop personally and professionally.

How has the field of law changed for women since you started?

Well – for a start, women are now allowed to wear trousers in Court which was not the case when I started! There is no doubt that women are better represented in the profession than once was the case – but firms and the judiciary still could do more. However there is a multitude of contributory factors which would continue to ease the path of women

so that after having children we do not lose their very great talents from the profession (such as more flexible working patterns, child care facilities, encouraging greater paternal input etc).

What are you doing to support women who want to progress in your firm?

Kingsley Napley will be unique in that as I step up to the role of Senior Partner, we will be the only law firm in the City of London to have both female Senior and Managing Partners. I hope our achievements will serve to show and inspire women coming into the profession that it is possible to achieve the most senior positions on merit and hard work. There is a lot of excitement at Kingsley Napley about my taking on this role because it demonstrates that women are getting to the top in the legal world. I can confidently say that there are no glass ceilings at KN! Furthermore, I am continuing to ensure we have flexible working policies to encourage the return to work of young women here after they have children.

What advice would you give to a young woman at the beginning of her legal career?

Always listen to both sides of the argument, whether on a client matter or in relation to office matters. Work hard, be confident and above all else, be yourself

How do you unwind at the end of a busy day/week.

I breed horses and no matter what, I always go into the barn or the field when I get home to see how they are all getting on. I spend hours watching the foals grow and develop – it is a great antidote to stress! Though cheering them on from the sidelines on race days is more of a contributor...

Kingsley Napley