

New Jersey Law Journal

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Top Women in The Law—Shirley B. Whitenack

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November 14, 2016

Shirley B. Whitenack

As co-chair of two practice groups at Schenck, Price, Smith & King—elder and special needs law, and estates and trusts litigation—Shirley Whitenack handles a variety of issues, and works closely with fellow honoree Crystal West Edwards. Whitenack also mediates matters. She is president of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys, and is active in numerous other professional organizations.

What's your single best piece of advice for handling a crisis?

Keep calm and breathe.

If you weren't a lawyer, what would be your career?

I obtained teaching certificates after college graduation, and I would have been a high school English teacher.

Name a mentor or someone you admire, and why.

My parents, who were Holocaust survivors. Although they really couldn't afford to do so, they financially supported my decision to go to law school when my children were seven and four years old.

Best advice you ever got...

One door opens when another door closes. In other words, don't miss new opportunities by dwelling on negative events. Learn from those closed doors and move on.

In 50 words or less, what does the legal profession need to do to improve opportunities for women lawyers?

The legal profession needs to recognize and overcome explicit and implicit bias and stereotyping, provide mentors to women attorneys, and make disparate pay and work assignments relics of the past. More women need to be promoted to partner and given leadership positions in their respective practices.

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Top Women in The Law—Crystal West Edwards

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Crystal West Edwards

Crystal West Edwards was recently installed as president of the Garden State Bar Association. As a certified elder law attorney an associate at Schenck, Price, Smith & King, she works closely with fellow honoree and firm partner Shirley Whitenack, and represents clients in complex trust-and-estate matters. Her topics and seminars address topics such as tax law and the Affordable Care Act's impact on special-needs citizens.

What's your single best piece of advice for handling a crisis?

Remain calm and steadfast.

If you weren't a lawyer, what would be your career?

I set a goal to become a lawyer when I was five. If forced to choose another career, it would be college professor.

Name a mentor or someone you admire, and why.

My mom. She was (now retired) the textbook definition of "working mother." She raised four children while at the same time maintaining a successful career. Her ambition was and continues to be the driver to our success.

Best advice you ever got...

Sleep is discretionary.

In 50 words or less, what does the legal profession need to do to improve opportunities for women lawyers?

The culture needs a paradigm shift. We must think beyond numbers and focus on retention and inclusion by utilizing the talent and potential of individuals. As more women assume leadership roles based on their vision and what they offer the firm, the best and most deserving will follow.