

Radar

Felsberg Advogados
Brazil

02

Ligia Schlittler



“I truly appreciate Legalink’s efforts in connecting the network’s women lawyers and believe it will be a fruitful initiative.”

BRAZIL



Ligia Schlittler

Felsberg Advogados
Brazil

.. FELSBERG
ADVOGADOS

1. **Could you share a little bit of your background?**

I am originally from Rio de Janeiro, where I grew up and went to law school. When I first started practising, I used to work in litigation/arbitration. In 2007, I moved to Ceará, a Northeastern state in Brazil, where I switched to Energy (renewables). There, I started working in-house as a project developer and, later, as a consultant. After five years of living in Ceará, I moved to the U.S., where I lived for five years and did my LL.M. and a program in energy and environmental policies (Duke Law). During my time in the U.S., I have studied and worked. I also passed the bar exam in NY and California and qualified for the practice of law in those jurisdictions before returning to Brazil in 2017. In São Paulo, I have joined a law firm, also adding buy-side M&As to my energy practice.

In hindsight, I realise I was extremely lucky to be at the right place at the right time. When I moved to Ceará in 2007, Northeast Brazil was booming with wind and solar projects, and I had the opportunity to learn “on the ground”, so to speak.

I oversaw the legal aspects of the projects and was involved in all phases of their development and used to go on frequent site trips with the technical teams. This was not only extremely enriching but has also shaped my practice and my career ever since.

2. **In your opinion, what are some of the key challenges women lawyers face in the legal profession?**

In my view, in the legal profession and in many other careers, the main challenges for women are equal pay and motherhood, and both have unconscious bias-related reasons. Why does a woman doing the exact same job as a man make less money? Objectively, this is something the corporate world could change by itself. On the other hand, from the “inside”, what I can tell you is that most of the time, women have a hard time talking about money and negotiating their own pay – and, when you look at the situation, you can clearly see that this “discomfort” or “inability” has obviously impacted women’s pay across the board.

Addressing motherhood seems a bit trickier for many reasons.

Well, first, even assuming that the odds are the same for men and women when it comes to being hired, as life goes on, reality shows that at some point, it becomes harder for women to advance in their careers, as promotions do not happen at the same proportion for men and women. A tangible “glass ceiling” that has to do with gender bias more generally but can also be traced back to motherhood. For example, like many of my female peers, I have questioned myself many times whether it was the “right” time for a baby.

Second, assuming that it is all figured out and that women realise it is their right to have their babies whenever they want, the bare truth is that, at least in the first year of a child, it tends to need and claim the mother’s presence more than it claims the father’s. Not to mention pregnancy itself and the hormonal instability that deeply alters female physical conditions, such as sleep, and that can make it difficult for women to “functionally navigate” real life for months.

Having more women at C-level and leadership positions, along with more public awareness of gender bias, hopefully will help mitigate the harmful impacts for women in the workplace and reduce gender inequality over time.

The fact is that women have historically been treated differently – socially, economically, and politically. We have been treated differently not only when it comes to our ability to work and make a living – or, more accurately, the social acceptance of our right to work – but also when it comes to essential things, such as the right to freely choose who we marry or the right to vote.

In fact, women have been viewed as “property” until very recently, be it formally or through social conventions, as, for example, adopting their husbands’ names after marriage. To illustrate my point, in Brazil, women did not have an individual taxpayer number and had to use their husbands’ number until 1967 (!!!).

With women being prohibited from working (except household chores and few professional environments where women have been allowed to penetrate) and left “aside” in all instances relating to social and political choices, it is no mystery why all the economic sectors (not only the practice of Law) have become entirely dominated by men.

On the other hand, we have to be proud of ourselves: if you think about it, if the status quo and all the situations faced by women may be seen as a challenge, at the same time, it is also a hard-fought achievement accomplished by several generations of brave women who came before us.

Nonetheless, despite having conquered many rights, such as voting, women continue to be silently discriminated against in the workplace. And we need to keep pushing towards gender equality.

3. **How do you balance the demands of your legal career with other aspects of your life, and what advice do you have for aspiring women lawyers in achieving this balance?**

Long story short, one word: self-consciousness. We need to be gentle and take it easy with ourselves. We have to allow ourselves not to be perfect sometimes and to forgive ourselves for not being the “triple A student” all the time.

We need to acknowledge that, at different times, such as when you are working on a tough case or when you have a baby or a toddler at home, life will seem a bit chaotic and will require some adjustments. But life will – and must – go on. It is just not possible to keep all the plates spinning all the time. There is no free lunch. If you dare to juggle to keep them all spinning, you will eventually pay a price. You may do so at the cost of your work-life balance or, worse, at the cost of your own health.

So, my advice to young lawyers or aspiring women attorneys is to prioritise. And to be fair in that priority ranking. Not everything can be a top priority, especially at the same time.

It is also crucial to learn how to ask for help and collaboration. For example, when it comes to parenthood, it is essential to have an open and honest conversation with your spouse/significant other about priorities and how to equally divide up the tasks.

.

4. **Can you share an example of professional achievement or success that you are particularly proud of, and how did your gender play a role, if at all, in that accomplishment?**

I do not credit gender for playing a role in my professional achievements. However, I acknowledge that women are very good at empathy and social skills more generally, and I have noticed that my team-building and leadership skills have grown a lot after I had my daughter.

Motherhood has also made me more productive. Has made me more sensitive to other people’s feelings and thoughts, and this also includes clients and counterparts. I became a much better negotiator. I have also learned to prioritise and better manage my time.

.

5. **Networking and building relationships are essential in the legal profession. Can you share insights into how Legalink has provided you with opportunities to connect with legal professionals globally?**

The network has proven to be a valuable source of trustworthy work colleagues and firms in other jurisdictions whom you can rely upon.

Legalink annual meetings are not only fun but also great occasions to network and cultivate relationships. These events, as well as participating in Legalink's practice groups, are also priceless opportunities to be in touch with different perspectives on any given subject, including legal issues.

Bringing new market trends, legal updates and issues in your jurisdiction that may be of interest to your colleagues and their clients is not only helpful but can also be a great way of building relationships.

6. **How do you see Legalink's role in supporting women lawyers in the network?**

Female networks and gender-oriented initiatives are extremely valuable to enhance collaboration between women. It is also a good resource for us to connect with other female colleagues and to learn about our mutual interests. It can go from merely getting to know female colleagues to whom you can refer work to bonding and making friends.

Women have always piled up work with all the domestic and caretaking chores, we are very used to not attending networking and social events. We skip networking because we need to get our kids from school. Because we want to get home early to cook dinner or simply have a family meal. Sometimes, we skip it just because we want a bit of "me time", like getting a manicure.

Women have great emotional intelligence and excellent social skills! Nonetheless, we have simply skipped networking. It was about time we realised we needed to get connected.

Men have been networking for centuries! They have several male colleagues they can count on, to whom they can refer work or from whom they can get a referral. It is one of the many skills and aspects women need to catch up on.

We can also use this opportunity to learn best D&I practices from each other and help to globally disseminate them. I truly appreciate Legalink's efforts in connecting the network's women lawyers and believe it will be a fruitful initiative.

