

NSBA Member SPOTLIGHTS

by Megan Belcher

Last year, *The Nebraska Lawyer* featured an article summarizing the results of a recent survey conducted by the NSBA's Women in the Law Section exploring the extent of gender-based inappropriate conduct, and gender-based harassment and discrimination occurring in Nebraska's legal communities and workplaces. That article ended with a call to action, challenging us all to do better and emphasizing the need for more women in leadership roles in the practice of law in Nebraska. For this Member Spotlight, I collaborated with five other women General Counsel in Nebraska, asking them to identify women leading in corporate-focused practice in our state and asking them to identify the skills that helped these women become leaders and their advice to other women seeking to lead in the law.

Rebecca Bortolotti

Partner, Advent, LLP

*Nominated by Nancy Crawford,
General Counsel, Mutual of Omaha*



Description of Practice: "I focus on a holistic approach to provide advice and counsel in the areas of innovation and technology. I blend my extensive in-house experience with my deep expertise in complex transactions involving technology and intellectual property to bring creative, business focused solutions to the client."

Why Nancy nominated Rebecca: "Rebecca is a leader in the Omaha chapter of Drinks Among Friends, an organization that provides development and networking opportunities for women attorneys in the Omaha area, and which she expanded to lead in Minneapolis. I admire Rebecca for leading in a forum for women attorneys at all stages of their careers and for bringing education and development ideas to women who don't have access to those resources."

Rebecca's strengths: "Practicality and creativity are my superpowers. As a technology-focused attorney, there is a tendency to bury oneself in the details of the innovation or technology at issue. However, it is critical to understand the business and financial goals related to the innovation/technology to deliver a legal course of action that is best for the particular organization's goals and bring creativity to the solutions offered."

Rebecca's strengths: "Practicality and creativity are my superpowers. As a technology-focused attorney, there is a tendency to bury oneself in the details of the innovation or technology at issue. However, it is critical to understand the business and financial goals related to the innovation/technology to deliver a legal course of action that is best for the particular organization's goals and bring creativity to the solutions offered."

Rebecca's goals: "I would like to help change the perspective that outside lawyers are hourly rate cost centers that drag on the bottom line. Instead, lawyers should be seen as critical business partners that are focused on the overall success of their clients, where value is not measured by the hour but rather by the impact."

Joint advice from Ms. Crawford and Ms. Bortolotti to women rising in the practice of law in Nebraska: There is such pressure at the beginning of your career to choose an area of law to focus on, to work as hard and long as you can, and to develop a plan for your career long term. Be comfortable with experimentation. You will spend a lot of time at work – make sure it is something you enjoy.

Marnie Jensen

Partner, Husch Blackwell, LLP

*Nominated by Megan Belcher,
SVP and General Counsel, The Scoular
Company*



Description of Practice: Marnie is Husch Blackwell's Omaha Office Managing Partner and nationwide Chair of the firm's Food Regulatory practice. Marnie is a commercial litigator and food regulatory attorney. She specializes in complex business disputes, notably recently winning a \$720 million judgment in Sarpy County, Nebraska on behalf of her clients in one of the largest valuation disputes in Nebraska history.

Why Megan nominated Marnie: "Marnie is truly a unique individual and advocate, who brings her authentic self to the table and can always inspire me to resist the inertia of caving to popular opinion and the status quo in the practice of law. Marnie is also a strong and outspoken proponent for inclusion in our community, and we need as many of those strong voices as we can get."

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Marnie's strengths: "My superpower is my ability to connect with my clients and quickly build mutual trust. Success for me has always come when I am truly partnered with my client from the beginning of a case or conflict. When my clients see my investment goes far beyond 'just the case,' they are also more invested."

Marnie's goals: "I want to continue to create opportunities for women and diverse attorneys in Nebraska. In my experience, a diverse team is a more successful team, and our Nebraska legal employers must recognize that and make a commitment to action across the State. When our bench and bar are all rowing the boat in the same direction, we'll get progress, but getting everyone has to first get in the boat."

Joint advice from Ms. Belcher and Ms. Jensen to women rising in the practice of law in Nebraska: Be yourself. Bringing authenticity to your career, your practice, and your life will form more powerful personal and client relationships, that will serve you dramatically better in the long run. Trying to fit yourself into a one shoe fits all model of lawyering and leadership benefits no one but the status quo.

Kelli Lieurance

Partner, Baird Holm LLP

*Nominated by Anna Cramer,
Chief Legal Officer and General Counsel,
Nebraska Medicine*



Description of Practice: "I focus solely on labor and employment matters, which has allowed me to develop the depth of knowledge and experience necessary to be an expert in my field."

Why Anna nominated Kelli: "Kelli is not just a great attorney, she's also a strong advocate and role model for other women in the profession. She constantly raises the bar and encourages others to think bigger and do better. I am inspired by Kelli's work as Director of HR Nebraska, her service on the University of Kansas School of Law Board of Governors, and her contributions as a member of the Advocacy Committee of the ICAN Women's Leadership Conference."

Kelli's strengths: "Some of my greatest strengths lie in my relational style with clients and my collaborative approach to resolving difficult situations."

Kelli's goals: "I aspire to continue developing my own brand as the 'go-to' attorney for businesses looking for a collaborative partner who can easily adapt her approach and expertise to their specific needs."

Joint advice from Ms. Cramer and Ms. Lieurance to women rising in the practice of law in Nebraska: Be an advocate for yourself and other women. Build a strong network and keep sending the ladder down.

Jane Langan Mach

Partner, Rembolt Ludtke LLP

*Nominated by Christine Neighbors,
SVP and General Counsel, Ameritas*



Description of Practice: "I help people solve complex problems, most often with family issues and mediation but also in civil litigation and insurance matters. I am admitted to state and federal courts including the United States Supreme Court, and I teach family law and pretrial litigation at the University of Nebraska College of Law."

Why Christine nominated Jane: "In my experience over the years working with Jane, she is creative in her approach to the law and a great partner with her clients in developing strategy. Not only does her legal work shine, but her compassion and honesty help to shepherd clients through a complex system. Overall, she is a great human."

Jane's strengths: "I try to help people focus on the things that are important, which may not always be the things that seem urgent. People get overwhelmed with the legal process, and they need help sorting out which things are worth going to the mat over and which things can be disposed of without burning bridges unnecessarily."

Jane's goals: "I love what I do. I'd like to do more mediation, because that helps people come up with solutions they can 'buy into' rather than having decisions imposed on them by strangers. My aspiration is for people to think I fought for what was right and fair and helped them come through the legal process without having compromised their best selves."

Joint advice from Ms. Neighbors and Ms. Langan Mach to women rising in the practice of law in Nebraska: Learn as much as possible as fast as possible, and do not be afraid to make contacts and ask for guidance or mentorship when you need it.

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Abigail Moland

*Partner and Member of the Board of Directors,
McGrath North Mullin & Kratz, PC LLO
Nominated by Kari O'Neill,
Vice President & Group General Counsel,
Valmont Utility*



Description of Practice: “I am a litigator and strategic advisor on a broad range of labor and employment matters.”

Why Kari nominated Abigail: “Abbey’s demeanor is calm and unassuming, but she has a poise and strength to her that allows her to command any situation. Additionally, her legal expertise and relentless attention to detail allow her to provide first-class counsel consistently. Abbey is passionate about meaningful promotion of women in the legal profession, driven by the belief that true change comes when women hold power in position and financially.”

Abigail’s strengths: “I have a unique demeanor and approach to the way I practice of law. I have ability to be genuine, practical, and calm in the face of a challenge, while strong and strategic in partnering with clients to resolve any issue. Who I am as a person is who I am as a lawyer.”

Abigail’s goals: “I hate the statistics about the dearth of women in law, especially in shareholder or leadership roles in law firms. Serving as part of my firm’s leadership team, much of my focus remains directed at advancing the opportunities of women within client organizations, the broader legal community, and within my firm by promoting women’s roles as part of client teams through external networking and in internal leadership opportunities. In sum, I’d like to change the statistics, and I seek out leadership positions that give me the leverage to produce change.”

Joint advice from Ms. O’Neill and Ms. Moland to women rising in the practice of law in Nebraska: Cultivate relationships without an expectation of a quid pro quo. Learn from those around you about not only technical issues but also navigating the life of a lawyer.

Tara Stingley

*Partner, Cline Williams Wright Johnson & Oldfather, LLP
Nominated by Kara Ronnau,
General Counsel, Aurora Cooperative
Elevator Company*



Description of Practice: “I specialize in employment law, advising clients on best employment practices; policies and procedures; compliance with federal, state, and local employment laws and regulations; and mitigating risk on employment claims.”

Why Kara nominated Tara: “Tara is a dynamic lawyer who brings exceptional value to her clients, colleagues, and the Nebraska bar through her advocacy skills, intellect, and unmatched work ethic.”

Tara’s strengths: “Grit and perseverance. The practice of law can be challenging and even more so when balanced with the demands of raising a family. But, being able to recognize this and admit when things are difficult makes it easier to see a light at the end of the tunnel and to know you can push through.”

Tara’s goals: “At times, I think women feel pressure to ‘have it all’ or to ‘be all things to all people.’ No one can do it all (at least all at the same time), and that’s okay. My hope is to one-day look back on my years as a lawyer, on my time with my family, and what I did to serve others and have no regrets on the choices I made and the way in which I lived my life.”

Joint advice from Ms. Ronnau and Ms. Stingley to women rising in the practice of law in Nebraska: You will inevitably run into challenges, doubt your abilities, and wonder whether you made the right decision in becoming a lawyer. It is in these times that it is so important to be surrounded by people, personally and professionally, who will support you.

Megan Belcher is the Senior Vice President, General Counsel and Corporate Secretary of The Scouler Company, where she leads the company’s Legal and Brand Marketing and Corporate Communications functions. Megan spends her professional investment time advocating for, coaching, and facilitating accessible development pathways for women aspiring to lead in the legal profession.

