

HOUSTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

Women Who Mean Business: Hillary Holmes, partner at Gibson Dunn



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HOUSTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

Hillary H. Holmes, corporate partner, Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP

Category: Outstanding Business Leader in Law

Education: Bachelor's, Duke University; J.D., University of Pennsylvania

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What's the biggest challenge you've faced in your career?

Opening some doors that are just not open to women in my industry. I found they are often unlocked – but you have to have the courage to turn the knob and walk in with confidence. I also found it is sometimes best to create my own doors.

What is something professional women need to know that isn't taught at school or in training? It is nice to be important, but it is more important to be nice. If people like you and know you are dedicated to high quality work, they will hire you and support you at the right time.

What's a mistake you've made and what did you learn from it?

I assumed I would be rewarded if I worked hard and deserved

it. But I learned things do not always work that way. You have to ask for what you want and deserve. You should be able to provide quantitative justification for your request – but you have to make the request.

How has mentorship been an influence on your career? I would not have achieved the success I have had without a great mentor and sponsor. Find the person you want to be your mentor and ask them to be it. Work hard for them and prove you are worth their time. And once you have reached a certain level, pay it back and start mentoring others with potential.

What would be your fantasy career if you weren't doing what you're doing now? I would be a construction worker. I would be part of building something tangible and positive. I love a good challenge that requires hard work and produces a constructive result.

This interview was edited for length and clarity.