

'Now What Makes Juries Listen': A Program Recap at the DRI Seminar

Women Connect

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The Defense Research Institute's Women in the Law Committee hosted "Sharing Success -- A Seminar for Women Lawyers" at the chic Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami Beach, Fla., on February 3-4, 2011. The event, which attracted well over 200 women from across the United States and Canada, focused on the unique challenges women face in the legal profession as well as alternative solutions for achieving and maintaining a successful legal career. Attendees included young lawyers, well seasoned partners, in-house counsel for major corporations (including Burger King, Starbucks Coffee, Electric Insurance, LP Building Products, and Sun Trust Bank), judges, and many women who had transitioned from successful legal careers to law related consultant businesses. The group's collective wisdom, experience and accomplishments were impressive, as was the lively discourse generated during several of the presentations, most notably the popular "Now What Makes Juries Listen?" by the entertaining and charismatic Sonya Hamlin. In her presentation, Hamlin – president of Sonya Hamlin Communications in New York and creator of the first course in courtroom communications at Harvard Law School – shared insight from her landmark book of the same name on the positive impact female litigators have on juries and trial outcomes. Hamlin also lectures worldwide and consults with law firms and corporations about juror attitudes, prejudices and advocacy skills.

The audience listened with rapt attention to Hamlin's survey of the many positive attributes of female litigators. She began by explaining the importance of body language, which people use most to determine credibility. According to Hamlin, this bodes well for women, who jurors think are more credible than men because of the historical perception that women are more nurturing. The audience was able to see this firsthand by way of a taped discussion among mock jurors who were asked to evaluate a male and female cross-examination of an expert witness. The mock jurors found the female cross-examiner to be more effective and convincing, specifically because she took the time to explain unfamiliar terms to the jury and acknowledged them by a simple greeting or body

language. As a result of this perception, jurors listen more carefully to women, which is an added advantage.

As much as jurors care about what women say, however, they also care about how women look. Jurors are interested in our hair, the way we dress, and most surprisingly, our shoes. Hamlin suggested that we take this seriously and invest in a makeover before going to trial, focusing on a flattering hair style, color and makeup, including lipstick, since a significant amount of focus will be on our mouths. And, invest in a nice wardrobe, but nothing that could be considered too flashy or well above any juror's pay grade. The same mock jurors had high praise for the female cross-examiner's clothes and shoes, which both male and female jurors complimented because of the bold colors (a combination of reds, browns and oranges). Be sure though that your wardrobe colors convey strength and confidence. In this regard, pastels, which may be the color of choice for some, should be avoided, since they are associated with weakness.

Another leading jury consultant who attended the seminar echoed these sentiments, even noting that many of her clients are now specifically requesting female litigators to try difficult cases. This can only provide increased opportunities in the future to showcase the formidable combination of women's natural qualities and litigation skills, both inside and outside of the courtroom.