



Interview Questions - Women in Law - Chambers Diversity

Name, Job title, Company

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Briefly explain your career history and what led you to your current position.

During Law School I worked as a volunteer at the United Nations Legal Division in Vienna. There, I found particularly interesting the work on anti-money laundering and tax related issues with which I collaborated. When I graduated in 2003, I pursued the dream of joining a top tax law team, by working at *Marval, O'Farrell & Mairal*. My postgraduate studies in Argentina and at the Leiden International Tax Centre (The Netherlands), also helped me to expand my knowledge in the field.

Devoted to tax law ever since then, I enjoy the challenge this field provides to my daily life.

What is your proudest professional achievement and why?

While every single time a client says or e-mails me a sincere "thanks a lot for your great job" I feel really proud, finding out about a favourable ruling in a trial I took part of, probably stands out as one of the more rewarding experiences. It feels like passing an exam with an outstanding grade.

Having written books together with recognized tax lawyers whose books I used to study from and who inspired me to devote my career to tax law, makes me very glad as well.

What also provides me with a lot of satisfaction is that I am committed to putting something back into the community through *pro-bono* work. Thus, I enjoy supporting a range of organizations (such as charitable entities, art associations, etc) by assisting them with free legal and tax advice.

What are the greatest challenges that you face in your current role and what do you do to overcome them?

Being part of a leading law firm is a challenge in itself. This leadership has to be maintained and proven to the client in every single strategy, meeting, deal, transaction, memorandum, document or trial.

Furthermore, taxation in Argentina is a very demanding practice, with complex rules that sometimes change on a weekly basis, and very tight deadlines.

Recession and unavoidable cost reductions, force us to work with an extremely practical sense and to keep in mind business sensitivities, without relinquishing excellence in client services.

How difficult is it for you personally to attain work-life balance and how do you endeavour to do this?

I do not like to deem “work” and “life” as separate topics. Working -as well as mothering, “daughtering”, learning, teaching, writing, exercising, entertaining, etc- is part of my life and that is how I feel it.

I like to consider myself as a whole: not as tax-lawyer from 9 am to 8 pm, as a mother in the early mornings, nights and weekends, as a teacher on Thursday afternoons, as an art student Saturday mornings, as a gym-practitioner twice a week, etc.

Rather, I prefer to make a good mix of everything and do whatever is required at all times. People at Marval are used to sometimes seeing me working at my office with the double-stroller beside me, and it is not rare if -on weekends- I share breakfast with my family with a couple of books or files around us. It also helps a lot that I live pretty close to work. So, most of the days, I manage to ‘escape’ at lunchtime to breast-feed my baby twins and spend some time with them before facing the rest of the day at the office.

I also try to compensate lost time: if I have been working until late one night, the next morning I struggle to wake up a little earlier to spend time with the twins. If one of the kids gets sick and I have to take him or her to the doctor, I go to the office afterwards to catch up. And so on.

I am aware that maybe this is not the best method, and I have to confess that occasionally I would love to check in a hotel and just *sleep* for 24 hours in a row. But in general terms this system is working fine for me so far.

My loving husband, my parents, the nanny, technology and an excellent work-team also contribute a lot towards helping me find a good equilibrium.

Did you have a mentor or role model in your career or while you were studying law? Who were they and how did they help you?

My first mentors were my parents. With maternal Swiss ancestry and paternal Italian heritage, I was raised up with an education which combined a philosophy of problem-

avoidance and *discipline*, with a style that focused on *problem-solving* and *creativity*. This is why today I enjoy both, to advise as well as to litigate, and this is how *discipline* and *creativity* mean to me a perfect match to help me in my daily professional activities.

The partner I work with today was my in-house mentor. With patience and generosity, he helped me take my first steps towards the complex world of corporate taxation and exposed me from the beginning to high profile and challenging transactions.

As a *woman* lawyer, my third mentor was one of the most prestigious tax-lawyers in Argentina. She was also one of the first *woman* tax-lawyers in Argentina. A couple of years ago, on a Saturday night, I received a phone call from her. Earlier that afternoon, while working together on a book, I had commented my uncertainty about beginning to have kids at that time. I was almost convinced that I should better put the issue off until I felt more solid in my career. On the phone, she told me: "I could not stop thinking about your hesitation to start a family. Look at me. I devoted my whole life to tax law. I married tax law. And now, I am about to turn 80 and, while I am talking to you, I am surrounded by nothing more than files and books. Sometimes it is rewarding, of course. But still, something is obviously missing in my life. If I could just travel some decades backwards, I would try to find a better balance between tax law and other interests, especially family. With a good scheme of priorities, I am sure I could have managed to attend both things correctly. Please, do move forward, devote time to your husband, do have kids when you feel like it, do not postpone this sort of happiness for 'a better occasion', because this occasion could never show." This was a decisive conversation in my career and in my personal life as well. Some months later, I was pregnant with the twins, and now I certainly do not regret splitting myself in as many parts as possible in order to spend enough time with my family and attending my professional issues at the same time.

How effective do you think corporate diversity initiatives are?

If initiatives are needed, it means that the system is not fair, and that companies are trying to "solve" unfair situations. Ideally, initiatives should not be needed and positive attitudes towards women should show up spontaneously. Anyway, we women always appreciate any kind of programme that helps us combine as well as possible our personal and professional life.

What methods do you think are most effective and why?

I believe in meritocracy: responsibilities, promotions and salaries should be objectively assigned to individuals based upon their "merits" (i.e: intelligence, credentials, education and performance). Objective evaluations should help in assigning merits regardless of the person's gender.

Were there any points in your career when you felt you were at a disadvantage or at an advantage because you were female?

I always try to keep in mind that the fact that I was assigned to a particular deal on behalf of a leading law firm means that somebody trusts that I am competent and qualified for that work. This has helped me move ahead with confidence no matter if I am the only female in the room.

Being a minority in a male-dominated profession, gives as women a particular power. I am convinced that it is each woman's choice to use this situation as an advantage or as a disadvantage.

What do you think have been the most significant changes for women in the legal industry over the past five years?

While it is true that big law firms in Argentina tend to incorporate lots of women to their teams, and are gradually beginning to be less reluctant to name female partners, it is very tangible that most of the important positions and decisions are still mainly occupied and taken by male lawyers.

This is a pity not only because women provide a fresh different perspective to any team, but also because -on many occasions- people taking crucial decisions on the other side (judges, clients, etc.), are very frequently female.

For instance: one of the most important Federal courts that deals with taxation issues in the City of Buenos Aires is 70% female. When designing a defence strategy, a team composed only by men could discuss for hours how to best defend a client in trial, but only women know how a woman's head works.

The same happens with many companies that have female CEO's and CFO's. For sure it is an advantage for them, having female lawyers and female partners assisting them.