

# Do Some Law Firms Have a Bill O'Reilly Problem?

Accusations of sexual harassment and the subsequent departure of Fox News icon Bill O'Reilly, on the heels of chief executive Roger Ailes's resignation for similar claims, have created a media firestorm, and questions about Fox's culture are front and center. It has left many questioning their own workplaces – encouraging other victims of harassment, sexual or otherwise, to step forward; encouraging businesses and law firms to ensure that policies and practices are in place to prevent such behaviors; and, once again, putting the spotlight on an issue that should no longer be a part of the workplace dialogue, but sadly still is.

As legal marketing professionals, we play a significant role in setting and perpetuating law firm culture. These recent events force us to pause and take stock of how well our workplaces foster a pro-woman, equality-minded environment and to what extent our own contributions are helping to cultivate a sense of inclusion. Not only is creating an accepting and diverse environment the right thing to do, but it also naturally sets the stage for successful PR and business development.

## 'Leaning In' to Fight Harassment

In an April 17 interview with [Variety](#), Gretchen Carlson, whose 2016 lawsuit against Ailes was the likely catalyst that led to the resignation of both Ailes and O'Reilly, said, "It's so unbelievable that in 2017, almost every single woman has a story about sexual harassment."

If Carlson is right, we have a lot of work left to do. As professionals of the "Lean In" generation, we probably feel complacent, as if these are problems of the past. (*Lean In* is the title of a 2013 book written by Facebook CEO Sheryl Sandberg, and it has been coined as a term for women who commit to their careers.)

As public relations and marketing professionals in the legal community, we share some of the burden of putting the spotlight on our own profession to ensure that the culture of harassment, for so many years accepted at Fox News, is not a part of our law firms. As part of the "Lean In" generation, we are tasked to ensure that our law firms are places where we can all "Lean In," regardless of our gender, race, religion or orientation.

## The Benefits of Equality

Many law firms – large and small – work to celebrate diversity, understanding that differences make communities stronger, and have initiatives to promote both women and diversity in their firms. These programs – which include diversity councils and women's networking groups – are often designed to promote community, professional



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development, mentorship and personal enrichment. In addition to their retention benefits, such programs also are important in recruiting talented attorneys.

As marketing and PR professionals, we can advocate for policies that create a better work environment. Many firms are revisiting their family leave policies, enabling new parents – both mothers and fathers – to savor the first days of their children’s lives. The return on the investment is strong: This is a very important measure in recruiting and retaining talented attorneys. We can also ensure that law firms have – and enforce – anti-harassment policies, ensuring that the workplace is a positive and collaborative one.

Having, and touting, a positive work environment also creates opportunities for accolades. Publications such as *Law360* and the *National Law Journal* publish annual rankings of female lawyers, as well as diversity rankings of both firms and individual attorneys. These competitions serve two purposes: to celebrate the achievements of women and minorities in law firms and to remind firms to keep women’s issues and inclusion as part of the fabric of firm culture. And, of course, they are excellent vehicles for marketing and PR.

## Are We Doing Enough?

Are law firms doing enough to create positive, harassment-free environments? In the coming months, challenge yourselves to take a closer look, making sure that your firm’s women’s and inclusion programs are truly woven into firm culture and not just superficial.

If you would like to discuss how to improve your firm’s women’s and diversity initiatives, contact me, [Stephanie Holtzman](mailto:sholtzman@jaffepr.com), at [sholtzman@jaffepr.com](mailto:sholtzman@jaffepr.com).