



ROUNDTABLE PHOTOS BY KATHLEEN LAVINE

*Women in Law Roundtable (left to right): Kelly Murphy from Harris Law Firm, Sarah Hogan from Barefoot PR, Kelley Duke from Ireland Stapleton Pryor & Pascoe and Elizabeth Wylie from Snell & Wilmer.*

TABLE OF EXPERTS

# WOMEN IN LAW

A conversation with senior female lawyers who go above and beyond for their clients

**K**elly Murphy was toting her week-old daughter in a baby carrier as she strolled into the morning meeting. Kelley Duke followed, talking about missing her children all week because she'd just arrived back in Denver from a hectic business trip in Texas. Meanwhile, Elizabeth Wylie chatted about taking her children to Texas to visit prospective college choices. Although all three women are compassionate, kind and devoted to family and loved ones, there are other qualities and characteristics to describe Murphy, Duke and Wylie. They are focused, tenacious and

competitive. They are extremely dedicated and work diligently to help their companies, fellow workers, clients and favorite civic causes. Make no mistake: these ladies aren't stereotypes nor easily rattled. When it comes to business, they are at the top of their game and will have your back as some of Denver's leading attorneys. Wylie, Duke and Murphy headlined "Women in the Law," a Table of Experts roundtable hosted by the Denver Business Journal. Wylie is a partner at Snell & Wilmer, using her 25 years of experience handling

labor and employment litigation. Murphy is a third-year partner at the Harris Law Firm, which specializes in family law. Duke is a partner/shareholder who chairs the litigation practice group at the full-service business law firm Ireland Stapleton Pryor & Pascoe. Moderator for the Table of Experts panel was Sarah Hogan, principal and co-founder of Barefoot PR, a Denver public relations company that serves businesses and non-profit organizations.

CONTINUED ON PAGE S2



CONTINUED FROM PAGE S1

Q&A

**What is the most important thing you want readers to hear from you?**

**MURPHY:** Resilience. We, as women, do what it takes to be present in all the roles that we fill. We bring our best for our family, our community, ourselves and our work.

**WYLIE:** It is important for us as women to empower and support each other in the workplace. As an attorney representing businesses and employers, I get to help employers maximize worker retention and minimize legal risk through effective policies and procedures and inclusive leadership strategies. Outside the office, I speak on topics like pay equity and negotiation tactics. We need to support each other.

**DUKE:** I am passionate about developing authentic relationships with clients so I'm best equipped to advocate in their interest. It's a cliché saying – but I like to be on the front line. I feel that way about developing relationships with my clients, and also about other women lawyers who join me in destroying stereotypes about the legal profession, in general, and women lawyers in particular. I am committed to advancing the professional positivity to which I aspire.

**What was the path to your job in law and were there any roadblocks to ascending in your career?**

**MURPHY:** I came from a different background. I have my undergraduate degree in Studio Art and worked in film for a long time before I went to this career. What attracted me to the legal field was the ability to be problem-solving daily and having a dynamic changing environment. That was really important to me. The landscape of law is changing all the time. You could say I changed from creative art to solving creative life problems.

**WYLIE:** I think it was the support of my dad. He's a lawyer. My grandfather also was a lawyer, too. They encouraged me and it felt like a natural fit because I had those analytical and communication skills. It was a path that seemed very accessible to me.

**DUKE:** I took a more traditional path. I got a business degree as an undergrad and went directly into law school from college. I grew up in a small town in West Virginia and, frankly, there were not a lot of female attorneys in West Virginia, particularly when I was graduating. I thought it would be a good opportunity to get into a field where I could be a big fish in a smaller pond, particularly with respect to female litigators.

**What challenges have you encountered being a woman in a profession that was historically male dominated?**

**DUKE:** I don't view myself anymore as a female litigator. I just see myself as a litigator. I'm really trying to help the profession move away from the "female litigator" stereotype. Certainly, we all still face some challenges, but now we all talk about it. I'm not afraid of being a woman, and, in fact, I embrace it in my career. I just don't think it affects my ability to litigate. I was raised by a strong, single woman and my mother never let me get away with anything because I was a girl. And I don't think she's going to start letting me do that now, either. If anything, we just have better outfits (laughs).

**WYLIE:** A lot of what Kelley Duke said resonates with me. Back when I started, it never occurred to me to think about whether there were other women in leadership roles in law. In law school, about half of my class was women. It never occurred to me that there would be any obstacles to my success. I think that's a fantastic testament as to how far things have come. There were not a lot of women in leadership roles then. If there were, I would have benefitted from their mentorship and leadership. To have that diversity of perspective is critical in learning how to develop relationships with all different kinds of clients. I hope that it is changing and I do see it changing. We have women in leadership roles in my firm, including practice group leaders and executive committee members. It's great to see that.

**MURPHY:** I agree a lot with what both Kelley and Elizabeth said. Our firm has four partners and three of us are women. It is a neat dynamic there. In my firm, I haven't seen as much as a hardship for women who want to move forward. One thing I see is a lot of women in our firm, including myself, feeling the need – whether real or perceived – is to prove value. I don't know if my male counterparts feel that same way about needing to show value. It may just be something internal to me or women I see doing it but sometimes you have to say, "You're good. You've got this. You're valuable."

**DUKE:** My law firm is one of the oldest law firms in Denver [established in 1926] and we are now led by a woman managing partner. When I started with Ireland Stapleton 16 years ago, there were maybe 2 women partners at the time. We have definitely evolved in the time I've been there.

**Being an attorney is rigorous for anyone. Are there some challenges specifically faced by female attorneys?**

**DUKE:** I don't think my challenges are unique because I'm a woman, but it's unrealistic not to acknowledge that being a mother to young kids brings a different type of challenge. Real or perceived, the "mom guilt" is a real thing and I struggle with it. I'm very lucky to have a very supportive husband and family. However, I've been traveling for a week of depositions and I haven't seen my kids or spent real time with them in what feels like too long. I think men may feel the same [type of parental guilt] and I don't want to make assumptions on whether or not it's more or less difficult for them. All I know is my reality is having young children while having an aggressive,

WOMEN IN LAW ROUNDTABLE



**Kelley Duke**

Kelley Duke is an experienced trial lawyer who chairs Ireland Stapleton Pryor & Pascoe's litigation practice group. She represents clients in complex commercial litigation matters, and she serves as outside general counsel to clients in most industries including transportation, oil and gas, real property, as well as fire protection districts.



**Sarah Hogan**

Sarah Hogan is Co-Founder and Principal of Barefoot PR, a Denver-based PR firm focused on telling stories of community impact. An active community member, Sarah is a graduate of Colorado Business Committee for the Arts Leadership Arts program and a member of Leadership Denver 2019.



**Kelly Murphy**

Kelly Murphy handles divorce, child custody, and other family law cases that require compassionate and experienced guidance. Her work allows families the ability to achieve the best solutions, no matter how complex the circumstances. As a partner, Kelly also manages the professional development of the firm's employees.



**Elizabeth Wylie**

Elizabeth Wylie is a partner at Snell & Wilmer LLP with more than 25 years of experience handling business and employment litigation. She regularly advises clients regarding compliance issues and represents her clients in all phases of employment and commercial litigation.





Elizabeth Wylie is a partner at Snell & Wilmer LLP where she handles business and employment litigation.

challenging career. The person who coined the phrase, “work-life balance,” didn’t have a grasp on reality – at least, not for this job.

**MURPHY:** I think about time management. The guilt and all the roles you are in – that society puts you in or you put yourself in – probably is the most challenging piece. For example, trying to find time for self-care, time to make sure you’re a mom, a wife and on it for your clients every day. That time management probably is the biggest thing. My needs probably come in last.

**WYLIE:** I have the same experience. Kelly and Kelley have young children. My children are a little older, so we’ve gotten through that phase. That’s why having women in leadership roles with those experiences is really meaningful. Sometimes, it feels so hard that it doesn’t feel like it’s possible to do everything you want to do. To see that other people have made it work and to hear their stories is very empowering for women starting out and coming up. I feel really good about sharing my experience. My career was not a straight-up-the ladder one. I took some time off and worked part-time for a while but I still ended up in a place where I’m really proud of the family I raised and the career that I built. There have been times in my life when the focus has been entirely on work. There have been other times when the focus has been on my family. In the big picture, I feel good about the balance that I’ve achieved.

**HOGAN:** Early in my career, someone told me, “You can have it all but you can’t have it all right now.” That’s really stuck with me and that’s what I’m hearing from you.

*“This is a male-dominated profession. To be at Snell & Wilmer, where there are women as practice group heads and on committees that determine compensation, that makes a huge difference.”*

**ELIZABETH WYLIE**  
Partner, Snell & Wilmer LLP

**The three of you are in unique firms with supportive cultures. What has been the one important aspect of your firm that has helped support your journey?**

**WYLIE:** This is the first firm I’ve been with that has had more than one woman in a leadership role. That’s pretty telling because I’ve been in large firms for most of my career. This is a male-dominated profession. To be at Snell & Wilmer, where there are women as practice group heads and on committees that determine compensation, that makes a huge difference.

**DUKE:** I’ve been at Ireland Stapleton for most of my career. I’m close to both my male and female partners and we all support each other. We’re close to one another’s families and children. To me, that’s pretty special for a mid-sized firm. We don’t face the challenges of some bigger firms that are spread out around the country. We’re a pretty tight-knit group and loyal to one another, which serves our clients well. We are there to help each other out, including taking care of each other’s clients. Ireland Stapleton has been incredibly successful at retaining talented lawyers, which inevitably provides continuity to our clients and better legal services at the end of the day.

**MURPHY:** Our firm, Harris Law Firm, is pretty similar because we’re a smaller firm with around 25 attorneys. We’re also a tight-knit community. Our phones shut off at 5 p.m. and your work-life balance, to the extent it can exist, is something we help our junior associates understand. You have to find balance, especially in the practice of family law. It can be very emotional and it covers many aspects some people normally don’t realize. There’s even violence involved in some of our cases as well as secondary trauma. That’s why we’ve determined it’s very important to have a support network and coverage for each other in the firm. Key female partners in my firm have been amazing. It’s a dynamic I haven’t seen before because there’s not cutting down of each other. It’s all about supporting each other. We want every employee to be their best, to grow as people, and have opportunities both in our firm and in the community.

**What have you done personally to help empower or support other women?**

**MURPHY:** I became a partner 2 years ago and became the director of our professional





Kelley Duke is a trial lawyer who chairs Ireland Stapleton Pryor & Pascoe’s litigation practice group.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE S3

development. It’s been really, really amazing to dedicate my time almost every day to make sure everyone is rising up – not just women, but men, too, in our firm. Outside of our firm, we’ve dedicated ourselves to three areas: legal, local and international.

We push to help everyone become involved in our community in those areas.

**DUKE:** I try to give both women and men the opportunity to advance in their careers. I get younger lawyers involved in depositions and trials earlier in their careers than they otherwise would. I

am focused on allowing associates the opportunities I was given, and I try not to make assumptions on what they are able to do because of their family or personal circumstances. I want to give our people an opportunity to shine, both male and female, so they can advance in their careers and get the requisite experience to make them outstanding lawyers.

**WYLIE:** I love being in law and the intellectual rigor of it. I feel fulfilled by it and the relationships I have with colleagues and clients. I really enjoy working with younger attorneys – both women and men. I’m also deeply devoted to advancing women in their careers. On a personal level, I work with the Women’s Foundation of Colorado, advancing the economic self-sufficiency of women in Colorado. Professionally, I work with employers, defending lawsuits at times, but also trying to help businesses minimize risk of litigation by examining policies and practices in the workplace. I enjoy helping them make sure their policies and practices are effective and foster workplace equity. It’s been nice to find an overlap there where I can give support to professional women in my career and in my personal life.

**What do you think your unique advantage is as a woman in your practice - if there is one?**

**DUKE:** I think women are in a unique place because they are able to make and create long-lasting relationships where we can empower each other. Elizabeth Wylie is a dear friend of mine. Men may see us as competitors but that does not exist between the two of us. We refer business to each other if we think the other is the right lawyer for that circumstance. We have martinis and complain to each other on days when we feel like we need an escape (laughter). We support each

other in terms of our families and our careers. Women have opportunities to build relationships with each other in this profession so we can empower each other – act as each other’s advocates and champions.

**MURPHY:** I think we have the ability to shift from that inherently competitive nature to a supporting nature. I don’t know if that’s just unique to women. My type of law is very emotional. “Facts” or “truth” told by some people may not be – they’re really opinion-based. That means we need to make sure we are balancing hearing our clients’ needs for their life moving forward while navigating the legal landscape. Many times, the two opposing attorneys in a case are both women. Having a supportive relationship of their careers can help the families we are representing involved – some of whom are families being divided. This supportive nature can help minimize the need for litigation. It’s still litigation but, if we are supporting each other professionally, we can help a family minimize damage.

**DUKE:** I tend to find that when working with women litigators, we have a commonality that allows us to quickly develop a rapport and comfort with each other, much as two people would when crossing paths with someone from their hometown. So many of our experiences are similar coming through the ranks that we are able to seamlessly resolve complex problems, negotiate solutions, and come to terms in our clients’ best interests. That is not to say our male counterparts are much different but – as women litigators – we understand the challenges we faced to have gotten to this position and it really unites us.

**WYLIE:** I think clients benefit from the balance and sensitivity that I bring to the table, whether it’s in the employment law or business litigation context. Situations I get pulled into are often highly charged, so those skills help to make my representation even more effective. I’m not sure whether those skills are because I’m a woman or that’s my personal style. I’m sure there are exceptions in both genders.

I also try to find common ground with clients because it’s all about personal relationships. When you have a genuine, authentic relationship, you are loyal to them and can provide the best representation possible. I would go to the ends of the earth for my clients, so developing an authentic relationship with them is important.

**MURPHY:** Earlier on, I tended to confront challenges head on when they happen, possibly without the finesse I have learned. For example, when a male attorney may have been asked to do something I was not and I perceived the cause to be because of my sex. Balancing the politics of situations has been very interesting to learn. Sometimes, it seems like you’re bouncing from one type of stereotype to the next. Whether you’re being considered intelligent,



LEGAL ADVICE  
WITH PERSPECTIVE

One Simple Truth

Decades of Experience

Strategic Relationships

Denver  
303.623.2700

Grand Junction  
970.822.1300

irelandstapleton.com



*“Often, my colleagues from other firms trust and respect me because I have been able to stand up for myself and my clients. These relationships lead to more business.”*

**KELLY MURPHY**  
Partner, Harris Law Firm

pushy or needy or whatever words are being attached to being a woman expressing herself professionally has been really interesting. However, I enjoy growing through and developing my relationships. Often, my colleagues from other firms trust and respect me because I have been able to stand up for myself and my clients. These relationships lead to more business.

**What is one hope or one piece of advice you have for younger women looking to rise up in their careers?**

**DUKE:** Develop relationships and find your people. Find your tribe – people who are going to support you, challenge you and believe in you. Find mentors who will give you the confidence you need. Be compassionate and become an



*Kelly Murphy handles family law cases at Harris Law Firm, where she is a third-year partner.*

authentic person, because that is how you will thrive. There are a lot of people in this profession who will want to compete with you or turn everything into a controversial topic or situation. Avoid the drama and find people you can really trust and help you grow, shine and rise above.

**MURPHY:** Learn to prioritize what’s important to you. You may not have everything right now but there are things that may be more important right now. That client may take precedent that day... or your family may. Prioritizing what’s important is really massive in being able to move forward. Also, find a good sense of humor. You cannot take everything so

personally. Try not to be offended unless you want to fix it. Whatever your sense of humor may be, find it and embrace it.  
**WYLIE:** Building a support network is really important to having a fulfilling career and a successful one. You have

CONTINUED ON PAGE S6



# WHERE FAMILY MATTERS.

*The Harris Law Firm is Colorado’s largest family law firm, and focuses exclusively on family law issues such as divorce, child custody, and child support.*



**MINIMIZE CONFLICT. PROTECT THE CHILDREN.** Our legal experts will ensure that the resolution of your case is handled in the most organized, timely, cost-efficient, and effective manner possible.





Women in Law roundtable at the Denver Business Journal offices.

We value the diverse perspectives our women attorneys bring to Snell & Wilmer, and we are proud to support women in the highest levels of decision-making at the firm.

Snell & Wilmer

Committed to being your perfect fit.™  
Find out more at [swlaw.com/womens-initiative](http://swlaw.com/womens-initiative)

Tabor Center | 1200 Seventeenth Street | Suite 1900 | Denver, CO 80202  
Albuquerque | Boise | **Denver** | Las Vegas | Los Angeles | Los Cabos  
Orange County | Phoenix | Reno | Salt Lake City | Tucson | Washington, D.C.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE S5

to invest time from the beginning of your career. It's like a 401K. Investing time in your network is like putting money in the bank and letting it grow exponentially over your career. Another hope I have is in the area of pay equity. The Women's Foundation has done a lot of work in the pay equity arena as has the Colorado Women's Bar Association. However, there's still a lot of work to be done. I just read a study this morning about small law firms, which said women are paid 36 percent less than their male counterparts. It's still a problem in our industry. My hope is that by having better retention of women at law firms, that there will be improvements in pay inequity.

What words do you use to define yourself?

**DUKE:** One of the words I think we'd all use is confident. Over the years, I feel like I've developed a confidence in my legal abilities, a confidence in my relationship building, a confidence in my ability to represent clients aggressively, assertively and realistically. I bring a practical approach to my practice, which my clients see as confidence.

**MURPHY:** One of the big words for me would be compassion. I do like to be assertive but I do like to find a level of compassion. Internally, inside of our firm or with our clients – and with

*“One of the words I think we’d all use is confident. Over the years, I feel like I’ve developed a confidence in my legal abilities, a confidence in my relationship building, a confidence in my ability to represent clients aggressively, assertively and realistically.”*

**KELLEY DUKE**  
Ireland Stapleton Pryor & Pascoe

everything I try to do – I try to make sure I'm being compassionate. Maybe because I can be so assertive that I also try to be compassionate, which helps me find my balance.

**WYLIE:** My word is pretty similar to what Kelley Duke said. The word would be authentic. As my career has progressed, I've found my voice and become authentic to who I am. I have authentic relationships with my clients. I believe authentically in the positions I take for them.

– Edited by Don Ireland