



4 Female Board Members to Celebrate on International Women's Day

Skills and Professional Development



March 8 is International Women’s Day, and we should be celebrating the tremendous strides women have made in the workforce in the past few decades. However, we would be remiss if we didn’t note that the struggle for equality remains — and the numbers prove it. [The ACC Chief Legal Officers 2016 Survey](#) found female in-house counsel are still being paid less than their male counterparts:

“Thirty-one percent of female respondents make under \$200,000 compared with 21 percent of men, while 62 percent of female respondents report making greater than \$200,000 compared with 70 percent of men.”

The gender gap persists not only in female in-house counsel’s paychecks, but in their career trajectory as well. In another [2016 ACC survey](#), 42 percent of in-house counsel said it was difficult to find a position after taking a leave of absence. Women are particularly affected by this bias, as they are more likely to take maternity leave. It’s no surprise that this disparity continues to the boardrooms, as [women occupied only 19.9 percent](#) of S&P 500 board seats in 2016.

Nevertheless, they persist. Below are four female attorneys who used their tenacity, business expertise, and legal experience to become board members in the male-dominated tech industry.

Belinda J. Johnson, the chief business affairs and legal officer at Airbnb, serves as a director for PayPal (PYPL: NASDAQ). She has been lauded as “Airbnb’s Sheryl Sandberg.” [According to many](#), she is highly experienced in working with regulators, building internet-based companies, and expanding business globally. She is credited with creating a “social movement” at Airbnb “to connect strangers and foster cultural belonging.” Her business savvy is legendary and she is recognized as the “de-facto number two” at Airbnb.

Erika Rottenberg, the former general counsel of LinkedIn, serves on the board of directors for both Wix.com (WIX: NASDAQ) and Twilio (TWLO: NYSE). According to [Twilio's website](#), Rottenberg brings “extensive experience as a global operational technology executive and general counsel at leading, fast-growing, disruptive technology companies with global scale.” She also brings substantial experience and expertise “in privacy, cybersecurity, intellectual property, policy, M&A, and corporate governance.”

Alexa King, who is currently general counsel at FireEye and was the former general counsel at Aruba Networks, serves on the board of Vocera Communications (VCRA: NYSE). [King is an invaluable asset to the company's board](#). She is naturally collaborative, well versed in advising on rapid growth, and an expert on corporate, compliance, governance, and compensation issues. In addition, one of the hottest topics today is data security, as companies (and their boards) are working overtime to figure out how to breach-proof their day-to-day operations. King is uniquely positioned as a business expert in this subject.

Michelle Wilson, the former general counsel of Amazon, serves as a director of Zendesk (NYSE: ZEN), Okta, and Pinterest. She held numerous senior executive legal and business roles at Amazon, including general counsel and head of human resources. She has also led numerous operating and strategic decisions across the company. Wilson acutely understands growth cycles, leads fearlessly, and has great business judgment. [As Wilson explains](#), “All companies go through this cycle of getting messy, and then buttoning up the details, and then getting messy again.” She adds, “One key is using good judgment about what needs to be fixed now and what can wait. There are also milestones when things really need to get buttoned up, like an IPO. But it’s not bad to be messy. If things are too clean, it likely means the company is not pushing or growing fast enough.”

As shown by these four board members, it is simply outdated and inaccurate to categorically exclude any group from board service or question their ability to serve on a board. These female lawyers-turned-directors have proven that their value to a company and its board extends far beyond their legal experience. To be successful, in-house lawyers must become strategic business partners, skilled generalists, and industry experts. All these attributes clearly translate well to board service. In fact, any boards looking to add a business-savvy, highly skilled director should consider networking with lawyers, regardless of gender.

This year’s International Women’s Day theme is #BeBoldForChange: a call on both individuals and society as a hold to help forge a better working world which is more inclusive and gender equal. We couldn’t agree more — it’s time to have more female lawyers on boards.

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Olga V. Mack is a fellow at CodeX, The Stanford Center for Legal Informatics, and a Generative AI Editor at law.MIT. Mack shares her views in her columns on ACC Docket, Newsweek, Bloomberg, VentureBeat, Above the Law, and many other publications.

Mack is also an award-winning (such as the prestigious ACC 2018 Top 10 30-Somethings and ABA 2022 Women of Legal Tech) general counsel, operations professional, startup advisor, public speaker, adjunct professor, and entrepreneur. She co-founded SunLaw, an organization dedicated to preparing women in-house attorneys to become general counsels and legal leaders, and WISE to help female law firm partners become rainmakers.

She has authored numerous books, including *Get on Board: Earning Your Ticket to a Corporate Board Seat*, *Fundamentals of Smart Contract Security and Blockchain Value: Transforming Business Models, Society, and Communities*. She is working on her next books: *Visual IQ for Lawyers* (ABA 2024), *The Rise of Product Lawyers: An Analytical Framework to Systematically Advise Your Clients Throughout the Product Lifecycle* (Globe Law and Business 2024), and *Legal Operations in the Age of AI and Data* (Globe Law and Business 2024).

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