



■ REGINA STANGO KELBON
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Regina Stango Kelbon, past co-chair of Blank Rome's Finance, Restructuring and Bankruptcy group, heads the Firm's national bankruptcy practice. She handles banking and commercial lending matters (out-of-court restructurings, workouts, bankruptcy, and reorganizations) representing agents, bank groups, senior and junior creditors, debtor-in-possession lenders in distressed capital structures, creditors' committees, executory contract parties, plan proponents, equipment lessors and asset purchasers.

Regina, an American College of Bankruptcy Fellow, co-chairs the Third Circuit Education Committee. She chairs the ABA's Business Bankruptcy Subcommittee on Corporate Governance and is a Board and Executive Committee member (and past President) of the Consumer Bankruptcy Assistance Project for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. She served on the Turnaround Management Association Philadelphia/Wilmington Chapter Board and chaired its Network of Women (2013-2017). *Chambers USA* ranks Regina highly in bankruptcy and restructuring law in Delaware and Pennsylvania. She lectures and writes for the Pennsylvania Bar Institute and the ABA on insolvency and restructuring, and is a bankruptcy mediator. Regina mentors and sponsors women in the profession and as a senior female leader and Executive Committee member at Blank Rome. Regina, married to her husband Edward (also a commercial litigator) for 34 years, has two daughters, Nicole, 29, starting her Fellowship in cardiology, and Kristen, 24, a second-year student at Villanova University's Charles Widger School of Law.

What advice would you offer to women just starting out in the industry?

This question is particularly timely, since I have a daughter who is completing her law degree and is about to enter the work force. In our conversations, we have discussed my career and what I did that worked, and what I think young lawyers need to do to be successful in today's legal environment.

First, you need to set goals and priorities. People who are the most successful remain focused on what they want to achieve and develop a plan for reaching their goals. Passion is also important. Finding an area of law that you are passionate about will be reflected in your enthusiasm for your specialty and the way you approach your work. Find joy in your career. To paraphrase Mark Twain, find a job you enjoy doing, and you will never work a day in your life. While it sounds hokey, I found that working with funny, brilliant, creative, and caring people brought me the greatest joy and happiness in my career. My colleagues motivate me to do my best even on the toughest days.

Additionally, you must invest in and take ownership of your career from the beginning. It is hard to market your services until you believe in yourself and others believe in you. It is necessary to become an expert in your field before you can achieve success and respect. To that end, I took every opportunity to continue my post-legal education to refine my skillset. One of my mentors told me that as an associate, the first hours of every day should begin with reading recent legal decisions. I took that advice to heart and still spend several hours early in the morning reading new reported opinions and decisions around the country. Becoming an expert and striving to be at the top in your field will necessitate that you are continually learning, changing and keeping

an open mind to new ideas and ways to approach challenges. I look for conferences, programs, and webinars with leading scholars and try to make them part of my quarterly attendance.

Be all in. As with personal relationships and parenting, give your career 110 percent. I never asked anyone in my group to do something that I have not already done or was not willing to do, including working nights, weekends, holidays and on vacations. The bankruptcy practice in particular is emergency-room law, and clients and cases need immediate attention and responses. Being invested in achieving your client's goals and being available to solve their problems will resonate with your clients that you value and appreciate them and their issues.

Finally, be genuine. Clients and co-workers will know your reputation. It is important to be yourself and to maintain the highest standards in your career.

What do you wish you knew in the beginning of your career?

I wish I had fully appreciated the importance of business development and networking at the beginning of my career. Building a strong professional network of business contacts is important to your personal success and the success of your group. Business development requires relationship building, which takes time, effort and patience. As a young lawyer, just the everyday practice of law was all-consuming. Little time was spent or seemingly available for business development. Fortunately, firms have come a long way in providing training and resources to help young lawyers develop the skills to succeed in this endeavor. These have been among the most important and invaluable developments and changes I have seen over the years that will benefit young lawyers.