

Articles

"Creating a Brave New World"

Kathleen J. Wu
Texas Lawyer
May 31, 1999

Originally appeared in **TEXAS LAWYER**

Kathleen J. Wu is a commercial real estate lawyer and managing partner of the Dallas office of Houston's Andrews & Kurth. Her e-mail address is kathleenwu@akllp.com. The views represented here are her own and do not represent those of the firm.

Copyright 1999, Texas Lawyer. All rights reserved.

Firm Culture for the New Millennium

With all the hoopla over the Year 2000, I thought it fair to throw in my 2 cents. It's not that I'm worried that a computer bug is going to turn life as we know it into total chaos. No, I'm a bit more optimistic. I choose to believe that the next millennium will bring with it a whole new mindset at America's firms.

Yes, in the 2000s, the legal profession -- and the men who run it -- will finally "get it."

And even if they don't, at least I can dream. So, while I'm thinking about it, here's a list of things I'd like to see in the next millennium.

Things to Come

- *The women's restroom will no longer be a safe harbor.* These days, if a woman wants to get away from her bosses and decompress, she goes to the ladies' room. That's because, at most firms, the men's room is where the bosses go and the women's room is where the non-bosses go. In the 21st century, I'd like to have as many power brokers in one as the other. True, it will make it more difficult to have a good cry, but that's the price of progress.
- *Men will have to feign an interest in shopping, cooking and chick movies.* Too often, women seeking to be "one of the guys" pretend to care about sports, lest they risk feeling left out in a room full of men. In the next millennium, there will be so many women decision-makers, both within firms and as clients, that football will no longer be the default small talk.
- *Part-timers will be an accepted part of the scenery.* As firms seek to hold on to valuable talent, they will be more open to letting workers, men and women, take on smaller roles in the firm during their chief parenting years. Speaking as a supervisor, it's not always easy to have part-timers working for me, but I'd prefer to have 50 percent to 80 percent of a trusted lawyer than none at all.
- *A day at the spa will obtain parity with a day on the links.* It's about time that firms figure out that most women don't get excited about a day on the golf course. In fact, firms will have to rethink all their male-oriented business development techniques, everything from sporting events to topless bars (for those Neanderthalic few firms that still sanction such outings). Business-generating events either aimed at women or gender-neutral -- maybe even family-oriented -- will become the wave of the next millennium.

Wear Pants

- *Ally McBeal will see the error of her ways.* Not only will she dress like a normal person, but she'll also stop acting like such a ditz and finally be a role model women lawyers can be proud of.
- *Working dads will become a significant force in the workplace.* I envision male partners coming to work with baby spit-up on their suits; they'll end meetings at 5:30 p.m. because their day care starts charging \$5 for every minute they're late picking up their children; new dads will swap paternity leave stories; and some will even go to a part-time schedule (i.e. 40 hours a week) to spend more time with their families.

Articles

- *On business trips, men will have to pack three pairs of shoes and four changes of clothing for a two-day trip.* The new millennium will mean new fashion expectations for men. No longer will they be able to get away with wearing the same suit two days in a row. And "business casual" will leave them just as confused as it does women.
- *Pantyhose and high heels will be a thing of the past.* Particularly on business trips, women will be able to wear pants and low heels, and our client won't give it a second thought, because she'll be wearing them, too.
- *Our male colleagues will help us carry our bags when traveling on business.* I realize that this goes under the "having my cake and eating it too" category, but as long as I'm creating a perfect world, I might as well go for broke. Besides, recognizing that many women don't have the upper-body strength that men do isn't sexist; it's reality. We can still be treated as intellectual equals even when someone else helps us lug our bags.
- *Women will go to bat for each other in the workplace.* Sometimes, women who have achieved a certain status in the professional world shy away from being vocal on women's issues for fear of alienating the men they've worked so hard to be accepted by. In my brave new world, the women who have shattered the glass ceiling will reach down to aid their successors, even if means risking a cut here and there.
- *Every state will be like Arizona.* Yes, this is slightly out of left field, but those of you keeping up with Arizona politics know what I'm talking about. Arizona voters last November made the state the first in the union to have an all-female line of succession. In addition to the governor, a woman serves as secretary of state, attorney general, treasurer and superintendent of public instruction. Pretty impressive. If the good old boys of the West can do it, the less testosterone-laden states can, too.

And, finally, not that it has anything to do with gender issues, but in the next millennium, the phrase "Y2K" will be outlawed.