

“A Richer Way to Work”: Martha Samuelson and Andrea Okie Explore the Topic of Women and Diversity in Antitrust

Martha Samuelson and **Andrea Okie** — 9 MIN READ

Analysis Group CEO and Chairman **Martha Samuelson** was invited to participate in a roundtable discussion of the role of women in antitrust sponsored by the ABA Antitrust Law Section. In addition to Ms. Samuelson, the panel included:

- The Honorable Diane Wood, US Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit;
- Doha Mekki, Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General at the Antitrust Division of the US Department of Justice;
- Roberta (Bobbi) Liebenberg, Senior Partner at Fine, Kaplan and Black and an inductee into the American Antitrust Institute Private Enforcement Hall of Fame;
- Barbara Sicalides, Partner at Troutman Pepper; and
- Eleanor Fox, Walter J. Derenberg Professor of Trade Regulation Emerita at the NYU School of Law.

The discussion was moderated by Ian Simmons, Co-Chair of O'Melveny & Myers' Antitrust and Competition Practice Group.

Mr. Simmons launched the roundtable by noting that today's "vibrant and vital debate" over the appropriate role of competition regulation and enforcement has led many to reexamine their assumptions and precepts. He introduced the question of whether the role of competition should now be directed toward "issues broader than just price, output, and quality – social justice issues, environmental issues, privacy issues?"

In that context, the panelists shared their perspectives on the evolution of the law and practice of antitrust, women's contribution to the practice of law and economics, their own career paths, and what more remains to be done to further the advancement of women in antitrust. Each also examined the importance of mentors and sponsors and offered recommendations to further narrow gender gaps.

Click here to read a transcript of the roundtable discussion in *Antitrust* magazine

Following the roundtable, Analysis Group Managing Principal **Andrea Okie** spoke with Ms. Samuelson about how the panelists' experiences connected with their own at Analysis Group. They also discussed how women and other marginalized groups can navigate career development and support the career development of others in historically white, male-oriented fields such as litigation and economics.

Hearing from you and the other prominent female leaders in antitrust, Martha, I was struck by a common theme in your experiences. Each of you touched on starting at the bottom, as one of very few women working in your field, and, in particular, very few women in leadership. Yet somehow you managed to make a name for your work with clients and colleagues. That cannot have been easy.

As you well know from your own experience, Andrea, it certainly is not easy, especially in our chosen field of economic consulting. What's so unusual about our work – and it's not just antitrust but all the practice areas at our firm – is that ideas, methods, new products, and markets all evolve very quickly. That is particularly true in the digital age, but, as you know, it was already true when we were young economists.

As economists and testifying experts, we have to keep up by being flexible, creative, and curious. You always have to bring your A game. I would say that is an apt description of anybody who decides they want to make their career at Analysis Group, and it is certainly a marker of successful women at the firm.

That would be a challenge for anybody, but in your roundtable discussion, you and your fellow panelists talked about the added challenge of being a woman in areas that have traditionally tilted toward male leadership. Even in my own career, which began some time after yours, there continues to be a bias toward male leadership, whether we're talking about litigation, consulting, or economics. Do you see signs that attitudes toward and perceptions of women as leaders in our business are evolving?

We still all have a ways to go, but I do see some evolution in attitudes. Perhaps one of the more significant changes I've noticed is that there's a growing acceptance of the fact that work-life balance overall, including parenting, is no longer exclusively a "woman's problem." For example, I think there's less and less "secret parenting" going on, so to speak.

I thought it was interesting when Barbara pointed out that unless and until men take equal responsibility for the family and the home, it will be that much more difficult for women to achieve true equality. When I was starting out, I had to confront explicit expectations that a woman would have a different career path than a man because of assumptions about responsibilities around raising children and keeping a home.

I know I experienced some of that, and I think you probably did as well. But I do think that the growing recognition of the challenge as one that crosses genders represents progress and shows how the conversation is starting to change.

In one sense, I mean that quite literally. Today, many people in our field are more conscious of the language they use to evaluate women versus men. For example, people are being mindful of how words like "abrasive," "shrill," "stable," "aggressive," and "ambitious" may be applied to women in ways that can be harmful. There is a lot of business research in this area that shows that people look for women to be "likeable," and that when they deviate from norms of likeability, they are judged negatively. People are trying to be conscious of and careful around that dynamic.



Ultimately, we all must commit to fostering an environment that values collaboration, prioritizes long-term growth over short-term gains, and rewards people based on their work and their talent .... That can only lead to a richer contribution by economics and economists, to antitrust and other fields."

MARTHA SAMUELSON

I do also worry that women beat themselves up more than men sometimes because the language around their performance and the expectations from their teams are different. This can be a challenge.

One of the things I'm proud of in my career is consciously working to change the conversation, to help everybody inside and outside our firm stop thinking the problem is how to treat women exactly like men and instead focus on what people need as individuals facing different headwinds. I truly believe our firm has been so successful because we've always insisted on supporting everyone's success in a tailored way. That's really the only way to create a level playing field – by giving everybody the personalized opportunities and flexibility they need to thrive.

Why is it important to continue to push toward greater diversity, equity, and inclusion in our business?

Research has shown that diverse teams generate better outcomes. Whether it's academic research on finding compromise or building consensus, or business research that finds a correlation between inclusion and higher revenues and greater innovation, it is clear that diversity makes us stronger. Similarly, business research demonstrates that inclusive leadership practices are a key differentiator between ineffective and effective team performance.

This understanding is playing out in the marketplace. We are getting asked all the time by clients now for experts who are women or people of color, so there is certainly a sense in the world that diversity needs to be a point of focus. And it's not only our clients – all my fellow panelists made a similar point – for example, that judges are demanding to see a diverse group of economists and a diverse group of lawyers in the courtroom.

I've always strongly held that everybody is better off if we are working together in teams made up of individuals with a broader set of experiences, where each person has a voice and a role. It's just a richer way to work, to run an organization. It certainly pushes me to work on this a lot harder. But the "how to get there" is not as clear. It's something we're all still working on.

My own experience in working with you has been that one way to advance women or diversity more broadly is not just having senior staff step up to show their colleagues how to develop careers, but also to step aside and give us opportunities to succeed – or, sometimes, fail – on our own.

I agree. A really important point that several of my fellow panelists brought up is the difference between mentorship and sponsorship. Doha explained, "Mentors are people who can help you get answers to questions that you might not otherwise feel comfortable asking. They can tell you the unstated politics of the organization in which you work."

She then used a poker analogy that I really liked. She spoke about how a mentor is different from a sponsor, where the latter is "someone who has a stack of chips and who's willing to give you some of their chips or move those chips from their pile to yours."

To borrow from Doha's analogy, a mentor can help guide you to the table, while a sponsor makes sure that you have a seat at the head of the table and stakes in the game. For Bobbi that means you have key sponsors who will put their credibility on the line for you, who will advocate for you when you are not in the room.

Bobbi also highlighted some of the extensive research in the legal field that shows, as she put it, "women are actually over-mentored and under-sponsored." So I would add that it's just as important, if not more so, to have someone advocating for you when you *are* in the room – to put you in client-facing situations and allow you to take full ownership of your ideas and your work.

Judge Wood talked about much the same thing, of being conscious of the need to give as many people as possible "stand-up" experience, as she called it, in court. She said, "If you don't ever let them stand up, you never find out what they can do."

I can certainly say that, from day one, you have gone out of your way to first show us the way, and then step out of the way. I recall many instances earlier in my career where you and other senior leaders at Analysis Group worked closely with me to sell new projects but then moved toward a supporting role to let me step up into more client-facing roles. Bringing me along in this way was critical to my ability to develop into a leadership position myself. What advice would you offer others about how to go about doing that?

One way that I've found especially useful is to continuously ask yourself, "What can I do?" and not "What can I get out of this?" Simply put, I think we all succeed when we define our success based on the success of others.

That leads to giving people "stretch" assignments, and then knowing when to step out of the way, as you put it. Or, as Doha said, "Those are really hard-earned, valuable relationships that are born out of high performance on difficult assignments and projects." That's what makes the mentor-mentee relationship valuable.

But also, one thing that has always been very important to me is that I never want people at my firm to feel like they have to choose between what's important to them outside work and what's important to them at work. Work improves – and the work experience, the work conversation, and the work output all are better – if people's fuller lives are integrated into their work life, and when the whole range of what is important to them is part of their work life.

Ultimately, we all must commit to fostering an environment that values collaboration, prioritizes long-term growth over short-term gains, and rewards people based on their work and their talent, ensuring that their demographics don't impact their opportunities or assessments. I want to lead a firm that consciously and thoughtfully validates its employees' lives and needs both inside and outside the workplace, especially for women and other marginalized groups. That can only lead to a richer contribution by economics and economists, to antitrust and other fields. ■