



# In Conversation with Ann Watterworth

## The Evolution of Women's Groups at Cassels Brock

### Let's start with a bit about you. When did you join the firm?

ANN: I articulated at Cassels and then joined the firm as an associate after my call to the bar in 1989.

### You started the first women's group at Cassels Brock, The Women's Networking Group (or WNG as it came to be referred to) in 1996. Tell us about that.

ANN: Two things you need to know. First, it wasn't just the first women's group at the firm – it was the first organized women's group on Bay Street, of lawyers anyway.

Second, it wasn't me alone. There were 3 of us: Julie Thorburn, now a judge of the Superior Court and Robyn Colver, now General Counsel for Canadian Tire, one of our clients.

### What was the impetus for forming the WNG?

ANN: The profession was changing. The whole industry was changing. It was no longer enough to be an excellent lawyer to succeed in law. Now, you had to have business development skills. That was tough for us as women because the clients, the key decision-makers, were predominantly male. Robyn, Julie and I didn't have the same connections to these clients as the male partners. We also hadn't developed any business development skills to speak of at that point. We had spent the last decade striving to become excellent lawyers and starting our families. So we thought if we needed to develop a client base we should target the clients that the men weren't targeting – the women.

### Did it work?

ANN: To some degree. In the 90s there weren't as many women clients as there are today. But it was a start. We brought in training, something that not even the men had in those days. The U.S. women lawyers were ahead of us in organizing themselves. So we brought in a consultant from Washington who helped us and provided training. And there were ancillary benefits that we hadn't contemplated.

### Like?

ANN: We became recognized by some major corporations and external organizations as a firm that supported women. I'm proud of that. In addition, it turned out to be a pretty good platform for women to display their leadership abilities. In some cases, it's been the stepping stone to a place on the firm's Executive Committee.

### Were there challenges?

ANN: Yes, of course. There was a fear of standing out.

### What do you mean?

ANN: You have to understand that back then there were significantly fewer women lawyers and even fewer women partners. Many felt that it was enough that they got to where they got. They didn't want to be visible, to stand out, to make waves. They were content with just being here.

### Did the WNG have any impact on the firm at large?

ANN: It helped make connections among the women across all of the practice groups, many of which still exist today. It got people recognizing and talking about gender issues. It put gender on the radar screen in a way it wasn't before. And I like to think that it played a part in bringing women along to partnership. ■

*\*Ann Watterworth is a partner in the Business Law Group. She practices corporate law with an emphasis on mergers and acquisitions and mining. Ann is a former member of the firm's Executive Committee and former chair of the Business Law Group. She is a member of the Canadian Women's Foundation (Member, Girls' Fund Committee), The Women Presidents' Organization, a former director of Women in Trade – Ontario and a member of Canadian Women in Mining.*