



Fox Rothschild Podcast

The Presumption of Innocence

Episode 32: Celebrating Women's History Month With WWCDAs Global Chair and Co-Founder

*Featuring Matt Adams and Marissa Koblitz Kingman of Fox Rothschild
and Karen Popp of the WWCDAs*

Adams: Hi everyone, and welcome to "The Presumption of Innocence," a podcast brought to you by the White-Collar Criminal Defense & Regulatory Compliance Practice at Fox Rothschild.

Today we've got an exciting Women's History Month episode for you today, featuring two wonderful guests. First, Karen Popp, who's the global chair and co-founder of the Women's White Collar Defense Association. Karen's a partner at Sidley Austin in Washington, DC. And we're going to talk to her about the founding of the WWCDAs and what it means to the white-collar criminal defense community.

And also joining us today, a repeat guest and somebody that should be familiar with our listeners is Marissa Koblitz Kingman, my partner here at Fox Rothschild working in our White-Collar Criminal Defense and Regulatory Compliance group. This juxtaposition, Karen and Marissa, is great for me, because we're here celebrating Women's History Month and I have two amazing female lawyers and colleagues in the defense bar, that I want to unpack for a minute. Karen, how did the WWCDAs come to be? You've had such success here with your organization. Tell me about the early days. Twenty-five years ago, right?

Popp: Yeah, we are celebrating our 25th anniversary this year, which is just crazy. Where's those 25 years gone to?

We got started back in 1999. I had just left a government job, I was working at the White House. My good friend Beth Wilkinson had just left a government job, she had been at DOJ. She actually had just finished prosecuting the Oklahoma City bombing case. And, she went into private practice at Latham & Watkins. I came to Sidley at, you know, at the same time that she went to Latham. And, she's at Latham, I'm at Sidley Austin, and we both looked around and said, "Wow, where are all the women?"

Because we had been in government almost 10 years where there were all these great women role models, starting with Janet Reno, the then-sitting Attorney General of the United States, first female Attorney General. And then other women in very senior positions in the government. And because we were going into law firms, where, obviously, a big part of law firm life is building a book of business. We started looking around where's our network? And we decided to start getting this small

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group of women at the time who are in this practice to get together. And we had a lunch and we actually invited Attorney General Janet Reno to that lunch. and she came and, it was a huge success.

And, other cities like New York, there are women in those cities -- because we were, in Beth and I were in Washington, D.C. And, there are women in Boston. We had actually met women that year at the ABA White-Collar conference who were very interested in starting to collaborate.

And that was the beginning of what has grown into the WWCD.

Adams: And it sure has grown. And Marissa, I want to get your perspective just on, sort of, what it's meant for you, in coming up in our law firm and working in this practice to have at your disposal, the ready network of powerhouses in our profession, like Karen and the great women that I know who belong to the WWCD and are the leaders of the WWCD.

Koblitz Kingman: At Fox I'm lucky enough to have the buy-in from you and our leadership to support the WWCD. And we also have our Women's Initiative that is focused on the advancement of women and kind of sustaining gender diversity.

But we have a long way to go in our entire legal profession, and it's important that people are reminded of that. I think sometimes people tend to think, since we've come a long way, things are equal now, but they aren't. And that's especially so in our white-collar space where it's male dominated. And the WWCD provides, you know, encouragement, guidance, support, business.

And Karen has really taught me that it's okay to speak up about wanting to get business and wanting to succeed financially. Sometimes, I think especially women, we're taught not to talk about money. We feel funny about trying to promote ourselves. And the WWCD, through Karen's leadership, has helped kind of build my confidence in that space. And the organization creates access to opportunities that I would not otherwise have for business development. And the exposure from being in the room with all of these powerhouses and being able to go up to any of them and introduce yourself and have a conversation, you know, it's really meant the world to me in my career.

Adams: Marissa, you and I were just at the ABA White-Collar Institute a couple weeks ago in San Francisco. And, we were walking down the hallway and you actually said something out loud. You said, "This isn't like the WWCD meeting." As people were sort of keeping to themselves and not coming up and introducing themselves.

Karen, what you've built. and your contemporaries, what you've built is a real lasting legacy for the benefit of our practice. There's no doubt about it.

Coming out of that high-ranking government job that you had with the network that you had from that experience, Karen ... I always like to tell people, you know, on the defense side in particular, you want to have a bunch of different perspectives. And I can tell you from my own experience, Marissa and I have represented clients where I've had views on how to deal with the client where Marissa's called me aside, or we'll be out in the hallway, and been like, "Hey, why don't you try this approach? Why don't you try this approach with a prosecutor?" How important Karen, is it to have lawyers with



different views, different experiences, different backgrounds, bringing to bear those backgrounds for the advancement of their clients interests?

Popp: I think it's very important. I think that white-collar defense work is unique in the sense that you may be representing a company, you may be representing an individual, but there is a lot at stake for your client. And it's not a one-size-fits-all on how you're going to defend your client. And so, you definitely want to have different perspectives.

And we actually, at the WWCD, we have a lot of programming. We invite sitting government officials to speak at our events. Obviously, there's a lot of former government officials who join WWCD when they come out of the government. And, it's very, very helpful, to ... Obviously, you know, you can't do it on a name basis with your clients, but it's certainly very, very helpful to be able to learn from each other and to hear from sitting government officials.

I know that me personally ... I started my career in New York at a different law firm, at Sullivan & Cromwell. I then went over to the U.S. Attorney's Office. I then came down to Washington where I was in the Office of Legal Counsel at Main Justice, and then I went over to the White House counsel's office. In the second term of President Clinton, where I worked on both scandals in that term, both campaign finance and Lewinsky, in addition to policy-type work. But by the time I came out of government, I mean, I had had a very diverse skill set, experience, in the jobs that I'd held, which was extremely valuable as the white-collar practice area was exploding. Because Enron started around 2000, and thereafter, we just had one expansion of the other in the white-collar space. And being able to not only have the experience of being in a law firm, and then also being in the different government jobs, I think has helped me personally a lot. But I also have colleagues and know people who have never been in government and they are great defense attorneys. But I also think that every case is unique, and I think you can grow a lot in this space.

One of the things we've done at the WWCD is we've launched a mentor program. We're very much focused on the next generation of lawyers. And this is a practice that lends itself to developing business based on your reputation, based on the people you know, having people in your space that has business to refer. And as Marissa said, we're very open at the WWCD about supporting each other, referring business to each other, being there for each other, getting our male colleagues to give business to members of the WWCD. We've had support of our male colleagues from day one. I mean, just like this podcast that you're doing, inviting us on.

You know, we've got a lot of support in it and you can't get ahead in this practice without business referrals. And, for example, a lot of the Sidley partners give business to WWCD members. We've got a website that you can easily find us and hand out business. And we very much encourage that as well as the program and everything else we're doing.

Adams: Marissa, you're part of that next generation. You're part of that next generation of white-collar lawyers. Your experiences are different, but in some ways comparable to that of Karen. What do you think? And I know this, like any good lawyer, I, I don't uh ask a question I don't know the answer to, but what do you think substantively being able to rely on this preeminent organization of



women has done for your career substantively? How does this help you become a better advocate for your clients?

Koblitz Kingman: Well, as Karen said, the WWCDCA has substantive programming, virtually and in person. And so I've been able to learn about, you know, new cases when they come up. We also have this fabulous listserv that I use quite often.

Adams: I know I sometimes I say to you, "Hey Marissa, see what the women's white-collar group says about this particular novel issue we've got going on."

Koblitz Kingman: Yeah, and luckily, you know, we have an expert in every topic at the WWCDCA, I can tell you. And they are so generous with their time that they are all willing to pick up the phone and talk to you, to share resources. So, it's been extremely beneficial substantively.

And then businesswise, I mean, to go on the website, Matt, you know, because you are one of our supporters-- our co-counsel for a case we have now we got through the WWCDCA. So, we have access to all of these expert attorneys all over the country. Really all over the world, because now we're in-- Karen can tell you more about that-- we're in many different parts of the world.

Adams: Yeah, I attend some of your events. And one in particular, Karen, is where I first met you, at the annual gala, your awards gala down in D.C. And you mingle through that cocktail hour at that gala and it's really the who's who in our profession -- men, women -- but we're there to celebrate the powerhouse women that practice in this particular area. And, you know, I hope every subspecialty bar association has a WWCDCA. But I know that you guys are really leading the way.

And, you know, we've seen in the last 50, 60 years, sort of this resurgence of the women's role in the C-suite, and in particular. And we have women CEOs. We're not where we need to be, but we have lots of women CEOs and a lot of women calling the shots in some of the biggest, most powerful organizations in this country and economic engine. Karen, what's it mean for a woman in the C-suite to be able to relate to a woman on the white-collar defense team?

You made a really important point a few minutes ago, you said something like, this is really serious work. Like, we're doing things that have significant impact. At the end of the day, in these cases, some of our cases, people lose their liberty. What does it mean for a woman executive to be able to look across the table and see herself represented on her defense team?

Popp: I think it's gotta be, extremely grateful or thankful that we are at a place here in 2024, where you've got top lawyers that a major company -- major board, a major CEO, general counsel -- would like to hire that also is a woman. And I think that, you're absolutely right. There needs to be more women in the C-suite. There needs to be more female CEOs, more female GCs, more women on boards. But there are a lot more today than there were even 10 years ago, let alone 20 or 30 years ago. There's been a huge amount of progress made in that space. Like there has been in the white-collar space.



But having said all of that, and this is one of the things that WWCDCA tries to do, is to bring it to the attention of those making the decision that there are a lot of women who are really top lawyers in this space. Just like there are a lot of women in the executive space that are not yet tapped to be a future CEO or future board member. And what we try to do at the WWCDCA is to showcase the fact that we've got, I mean, WWCDCA now has 49 chapters around the world. Close to, you know, more than 3,700 members when we started out with 10 only 25 years ago.

And, we've got more than a dozen chapters in the pipeline around the world. Because there are a lot more women practicing in this space, and there's going to be in the future, just like we're going to have more women in the C-suite.

But I do think that there is the good old boys club where you might get selected because of who you know. Obviously, that is still around, you know, you can say that about a good old girls club, as well. But, what I think you endeavor to do at a professional level, whether you're a CEO or in private practice, or even in the government, because we have so many women in positions of power, is to find the best, and not depend on your gender. And that you be open to whatever the best is. And thankfully, today, a lot of the best are women.

Adams: Yeah, there's no question in my mind. I've been mostly exposed to your organization through Marissa, but, you know, you've got a true believer in me in terms of the work that your organization is doing. Where do you see our practice and the role of women going in the next 25 years? You've celebrated the 25th anniversary of the WWCDCA's founding. You are in the driver's seat of an organization that is only growing, only expanding in its influence, its prestige. What's the next 25 have in store Karen?

Popp: I think it's going to continue. The trajectory is upward. I think that this is such a lucrative practice. It's such a fun practice. It's an exciting practice. You look at favorite practices of third-year law students that they're wanting to go into, white-collar is one of those areas.

Adams: I don't work a day in my life. I tell people that. What I do is fun, it's exciting.

Popp: It is. It's a lot of fun. And, I think that it's, as you mentioned earlier, it's a practice that you can go in and out of different roles, whether it's the government. Heck, you can be in-house and come out of being in-house. You can be a CEO and go into private practice. I think there's a lot of different jobs you can have using this expertise. And I think women are positioned well to be in these leadership positions, whether on the government side, on the in-house side or in the private practice defending. So, I see it as a practice continuing to grow, continuing to grow for women. I do think, because it is a practice that is often a one and done, it's not one of these practices where you have clients. You know, clients don't ever want to see again after they're done, right?

Adams: For sure.

Popp: So it's not like you're a corporate lawyer where you have a client for the duration of your career. So, as a result, you know, it's a practice that you're constantly going to have to be, getting new clients. And that is going to be based on your reputation and people talking about you talking



you up, being a sponsor for you. And I think that's where WWCDCA can be very helpful, has been, will continue to be. Promoting the women in this practice, from the perspective not only of getting referrals, but we have a lot of women who want to go in-house, a lot of women who want to go into the government.

We're actually, just recently launched a career development initiative where we are collaborating with a couple of third-party headhunting firms, both on the in-house job side, but also on the private sector side, where we're making available for women who are looking to either stay where they are and possibly move up where they are, or, you know, make a move.

You know, I think women bring a lot to the table in this practice area. And I just think that is going to continue to move upward and expand.

Adams: Well, I want to thank you, because I always feel welcome when I attend a WWCDCA event. You know, for a group that is built around a particular demographic to which I do not belong, I always feel welcome and the messaging is always powerful, uplifting. And I think having colleagues like Marissa involved in the WWCDCA has made me a better attorney. It's made me a better mentor for younger lawyers. It's made me a better leader of my practice area and overall partner of the law firm that I work for.

Marissa, how do you see your emerging role as a leader in this area? Having been shaped through the WWCDCA, going forward in your involvement, how prominent of a role does WWCDCA play in your future plans as you continue your career?

Koblitz Kingman: I hope I stay as involved and become even more involved. I'm already lucky enough to be in a leadership role. I think it would be fabulous to continue to grow our New Jersey chapter and bring some of our more junior attorneys in. And I think it's important to point out that the WWCDCA is now involved in the rankings for Chambers, and Chambers reached out to the WWCDCA.

So that's really recognizing how important and influential this organization is. And so I am lucky enough to be involved in leadership. I hope I continue in that role. And I hope that I can bring in many of our junior, emerging white-collar defense attorneys.

Popp: You ask about the future of the WWCDCA. There is no doubt that we are going to continue to be enormously successful because of leaders like Marissa. I mean, she's one of our very important leaders. We actually have a pretty tight leadership group, which is wonderful. But everyone is so dedicated, to this mission of bringing more diversity and we can't do it without our male colleagues. And so, you can bank on it that Marissa is going to continue to be a very important leader for years to come.

Adams: We're running short on time and I want to pose one question you alluded to in what you just said, Karen. If you had one message to our male colleagues in the white-collar bar, what would it be?



Popp: I would say that this is a practice that you need a lot of women on your teams. And it's a practice that you're going to want to mentor women and bring them along and refer them business and empower them to be a leader in this practice.

And thankfully, I know so many men who believe that, who practice that daily. And those who have not yet discovered that, please do. Come to a WWCD event, we'll see you at the awards gala. It is a fun event, as well as our others.

And we just can't thank everyone enough for the support and for being part of this important mission of bringing diversity to this practice.

Adams: Well, that that's all the time we have for this episode of "The Presumption of Innocence."

Karen, Marissa, thank you so much for joining us in this special edition, I should say, of "The Presumption of Innocence," celebrating Women's History Month 2024 and the critical role of women on the white-collar defense team. Wish you all the best success in growing and extending this organization to even new heights.

You're already at the pinnacle, but just keep shooting for the stars and thank you so much for opening this message up to our audience today. That's all the time we have. We'll see you next time on "The Presumption of Innocence." I'm Matt Adams. Bye-bye.