

WOMEN OF INFLUENCE

CORPORATE EXECUTIVE

Nancy Sennett

PARTNER
FOLEY & LARDNER LLP

As Nancy Sennett was growing up, her mother taught her to use her talents to the best of her ability. That lesson is what shaped Sennett's life, one that has been dominated by education, whether in the classroom or in teaching and mentoring others. From her early years as a high school teacher to her role today as a high-powered securities lawyer, she said she learns something new every day.

She spent three years as a high school English and speech teacher after graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, eventually returning to school to earn a law degree.

Upon graduating from Northwestern University with a law degree in 1979, Sennett was offered a position at Foley & Lardner LLP in Milwaukee. The law firm gave her the opportunity to start learning again.

"I found wonderful teachers and mentors who were able to show how to get involved in the business of law and the importance to being involved in the community," she said.

Sennett, 59, came up as a lawyer at a time when there were few women attorneys, especially in higher ranking positions. But that didn't dissuade her. In fact, she was the first woman on Foley's management committee.

Sometimes early in her career, Sennett recalls, she was not allowed to eat lunch in the main dining room of city clubs because of her gender. However, her partners would support her by leaving the club and taking their clients somewhere else.

"I don't think I was consciously aware that I was a trailblazer, but looking back I guess I was," she said.

She was named managing partner of Foley's Milwaukee office in 2002, a position she held until May 2011 when she decided to focus on her securities work. She has handled many high-profile cases, including successfully defending Harley-Davidson Inc. executives against a securities fraud class action lawsuit in 2005.

Sennett's colleagues and friends said her deep roots in education are important in her many community efforts. Sennett is co-chair of the Greater Milwaukee Committee's education committee.

"She learned a lot of life lessons during her time as a teacher and that has really helped in our efforts to improve education in Milwaukee," said Julia Taylor, president of the GMC.

Away from work, Sennett's family takes up most of her time. She loves to travel with her husband, John, to visit their three children, which has led to trips to China, Africa and India.

— Abby Kass

“ I don't think I was consciously aware that I was a trailblazer, but looking back I guess I was. ”



PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCOTT PAULLUS / ILLUSTRATION BY CLAIRE RUTKOSKE