

Amy Schulman Prepared Remarks:
Legal Momentum “Aiming High” Award Luncheon
April 28, 2009

Good afternoon. Thank you for this extraordinary honor and for the wonderful work of Legal Momentum – a powerful force for women’s place and voice in our complicated professional world.

I want to start by telling you a story about the first time I attended this lunch. I heard Esta Stecher, the general counsel of Goldman Sachs, speak. Being me, I even remember what she was wearing, of course. It was a white turtleneck. But mostly I remember what she said because she started off quoting Allen Ginsburg and the beat poets. And I thought about how cool she was. I loved that Esta was unafraid to speak in a way that revealed she had a life. She didn’t feel she had to check her personality, her true voice, at the door because she was a successful professional woman.

So when it came to my remarks, I thought, ‘This should be easy – just speak in my voice.’ After all, I am long past the days of contorting my voice to fit someone else’s idea of what a professional woman should sound like. I wasn’t always so comfortable. Let me tell you another story – Early on, when I took my first deposition, I was convinced that I needed to look more imposing in order to truly bring my witness into line. So I pumped the chair

up so high that I actually wound up toppling over, leaving me on the floor with my skirt over my head.

Since those days I've learned to speak in a more authentic voice. I have spent a lot of time through my career coaching women on how to act confident without being presumptuous, how to ask without seeming needy. And to get organizations to recognize that they need to be far more accepting of the range of women's voices without suggesting there is one authentic female voice, or that we need to make way for a female voice simply because it is female.

But it wasn't so easy to talk about voice after all. I continued to feel that the concept seemed both incomplete and unfair.

Here I'd like to share a Pfizer story that helps to explain why the voice concept didn't satisfy me. I am one of the executive sponsors of a global diversity and inclusion effort at our company, and we've been doing some root cause research. I should warn you that this data is not finalized, but an early look at the data showed us that, lo and behold, the men surveyed thought there were far more women in senior management than there really are. And these same men thought there was a distinct career advantage to being female. Women, of course, had the opposite (and more accurate) view,

and identified, correctly, that there are not so many of us in senior management and that being female may not be such a business advantage.

So, this got me thinking, and it explains why I am not satisfied with talking simply about women's voices. Personally and institutionally, we are long beyond the days of wondering whether we have a voice – instead we must ask whether our organizations are willing to make room to hear them. I am sure that this explains why for some men, those whose voices must make way for other voices, it may feel like a zero sum game. These are some of the unspoken prerogatives of owning the discourse – the short hand of the institution must give way to allow other voices, because few things can be so paralyzing, or so lonely, as to speak and not be heard. It is our historical moment to ask of our organizations that they hear us, not *whether* we have a voice. Now I'm a realist, and I know it's our job to speak in a way that can be heard.

So I realized that what I really wanted to say is thank you. Thank you because the confidence I have in my voice belongs to so many of you here. As I look around this room, I'm struck by the fact that the various strands that inform my voice are only possible because so many of you have helped to create an environment in which I and others are unafraid to speak.

My father, who is here today, and who always encouraged his three daughters to speak out and do our best.

My mother, who went to law school at the age of 45 and was always a role model, is no longer here – but her incredible network of female friends continues to support me.

My four best friends from college, all of whom are still much cooler than I but who supported me as the philosophy major nerd in a group full of film students.

My husband, who has a unique perspective on how I deal with not being heard.

My former clients, who allowed me to speak for them.

My colleagues and friends at Pfizer, a truly supportive place for women led by our CEO, my boss, who does really get it, and the women of Legal Momentum, who are committed to ensuring that our voices are heard.

At the end of the day, this is the gift we can and must give each other – one that is so critical to real change – to listen to voices that may sound a bit different in tone, content or pitch. To allow these distinct voices to reverberate. And to require of our organizations that they be willing to change to hear all of our voices. That will be and is a measure of leadership, and I know we all are committed to this and recognize we have a way to go.

Thank you all for being here and for your support of Legal
Momentum.