

Top Women of law

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2012 HONOREES

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Rebecca G. Pontikes

Owner, Pontikes Law, Boston

Graduated: University of Michigan Law School

Working as a solo practitioner is a good fit for Rebecca Pontikes, who recognized early on that she wanted to choose the kinds of cases she took on and decide for herself how to handle them.

“I never have viewed myself as an entrepreneur, but ... it made the most sense to do that by working for myself,” she says.

Pontikes had been working mostly independently for a few years when she officially opened Pontikes Law in 2011. She now has the experience of serving as “chief cook and bottle washer” and, most importantly, pursuing the discrimination and other employment law cases she is passionate about.

She says she has a particularly low tolerance for sexual discrimination and discrimination against employees trying to balance work and family responsibilities. “That just gets me at the core,” she says. “If I see someone abusing their power, and I think that happens a lot in the workplace ... that’s the kind of case I want to take on.”

One of her clients, for example, filed a suit against his former law firm employer, claiming he was retaliated against for taking paternity leave and being the primary caretaker of his children. She also represented a woman who faced discrimination when she tried to rejoin the workforce after having children.

Pontikes doesn’t shy away from unpopular cases, a prominent defendant or situations where she’s likely to be the sole plaintiff’s at-

torney facing a full table of opposing counsel. Recognizing that solitude can plague some solos, however, she makes it a point to partner with other attorneys when it makes sense.

“Two people can obviously get a lot more done than one person can, so I’ve found it to be important to work with my colleagues and to co-counsel,” she says. “Collaboration is important, especially for someone who does the kind of work I do.”

Pontikes never considered corporate law or representing big business because, she says, “Those people don’t need me. I wanted to look for the people that needed me.”

What keeps her coming to work every day, Pontikes says, is the notion that somewhere out there, bad things are happening to good people, and she wants to stay in the fight.

“It’s my key belief that ... this has got to be done and I’m going to be one of the ones to do it: helping employees, helping them combat things that happen to them and being an advocate,” she says.

Speaking of a case in which she represented a woman who had been sexually assaulted, Pontikes says that at the end of it, she thought to herself: “This is why I became a lawyer, to help women like this in these situations, to make the world better, one case at a time.”

The best part about running her own firm is that Pontikes can, as she describes it, practice within her values. “I love what I do, even on the bad days,” she says.