



**Women Owned Law 2021 Legal Entrepreneur of the Year
Kyle-Beth Hilfer
Acceptance Speech-March 18, 2021**

I am deeply honored that Woman Owned Law has selected me for the 2021 Women Owned Law Legal Entrepreneur of the Year Award. Congratulations to Natasha Allen and Katie Lipp with whom I share this honor. Women Owned Law uniquely offers its members networking, resources, education, and inspiration. The organization has challenged me as an entrepreneur to solidify my law firm's goals. Its resources have stewarded me towards continued growth. Among the membership, I have found a trusted community of brilliant lawyers—who also happen to be engaging, motivating, and innovative women. That's why it is particularly rewarding to be recognized by this group of peers.

My career began in “big law” in 1987. Looking back, I appreciate the training I received, the friendships I developed, and the mentors who nurtured me. At the same time, I knew from an early moment that my legal career would go in another direction. I was a first-year lawyer and excited to participate in my first meeting at the Association of the Bar of the City of New York. I was keenly aware of the organization's prestige and history. I entered the committee room. Groups of men clustered together, chatting amongst themselves. I was the only woman in attendance, the only person under 30 years old, and certainly the only person who stood a mere five foot tall (5'2 with heels). On the walls, paintings of formally dressed men stared imperiously. When I sat in the wood framed chair covered with sturdy green leather, my feet dangled above the floor, and I had trouble pulling the heavy chair towards the table. I felt like I had fallen through Alice's looking glass into a potentially hostile world, one that certainly would not fully welcome me. At that moment, I knew I would forge my own path; I just wasn't certain what would that be.

As time went on, my desire to leave the established path toward big law partnership intensified. I longed for direct client contact, freedom to represent different kinds of clients, and a focus on service rather than the billable hour. In 1993, I launched Hilfer Law. My mission was trifold: to support my advertising and intellectual property law clients with the best legal advice, to foster my clients' business goals and success; and to promote conflict resolution beyond the court system. In the early 90s, there were few entrepreneurial role models for me in the legal profession, and even fewer who were women. Instead, my biggest cheerleaders were members of a New York City mother's group. In that intimate setting, I learned that women entrepreneurs have a unique relationship with and responsibility to one another.

Over the years, I have developed a recipe for entrepreneurship I call the 4 D's. Devotion, Determination, Diversity, and Donation. Devotion means being excellent and totally devoted to the craft of lawyering. Determination reflects the complete focus and unwavering belief in



yourself required to overcome doubts and obstacles. By Diversity, I refer to having a variety of networks and colleagues for support, as well as diversity of practice areas to create balance in income streams. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, Donation. Where can I help? Who can I support? During the pandemic, I have shifted my volunteerism based on immediate community needs. I have served as a volunteer lawyer at the Pace Women's Justice Center and as a mediator in the overtaxed court system. I also joined a mentoring circle at my local bar association. I hope to assist young women lawyers, in particular, to be loyal to their aspirations and not their fears.

I would be remiss if I did not thank my many colleagues with whom I have collaborated over the years as well as my clients. It is a privilege to serve you as a trusted legal advisor. I also thank my husband and four children for their unflagging support and sacrifice over the years.

I recently shared a Rumi poem with my family that feels appropriate for this professional moment. "May the beauty you love, be what you do. There are 100s of ways to kneel and kiss the ground." Those two lines embody a perfect definition of entrepreneurship. It is an honor to be in the company of Women Owned Law's members who follow this mantra of self-determination, creativity, and joy. With Rumi's words as an invocation for our futures, I humbly thank Women Owned Law for this honor.