



Helene Pangalos

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Tell us about your firm or business including history, specialization, and years in business.

I have been practicing for more than 30 years, all in real estate. I began my career by working at a local political law firm in Manhattan in their real estate transactional department. From there, I was recruited to a mid-size Manhattan based firm, where I was the #2 attorney on my largest deal ever - a portfolio purchase of 50 office buildings in 20 states for more than \$300 Million. Of course, that deal meant that I barely slept for six months. I moved to a national law firm where I handled a number of large office and retail leases, and then I went out on my own, 20 years ago this past summer, and I haven't looked back! Celebrating my 20th anniversary in solo-preneurship is a feat I am very proud of.

What's an interesting fact about you or your firm that most people don't know?

It is rare to see a transactional attorney handle both commercial leasing as well as residential purchases and sales, as transactional law is very time intensive. It demands responses within 24-48 hours, so you have to be efficient and available, and your schedule is often not your own. Balancing this immediacy with all else is always a challenge, but one I thrive on.

What's a favorite moment of your career so far?

My representation of Serena and Venus Williams in a purchase years ago. I was brought in by their entertainment attorney for one specific real estate transaction that became tricky on the fly. However, my handling of it impressed the entertainment attorney such that numerous additional transactions followed for the tennis players. It also led to a referral to a Fortune 500 company to prepare and negotiate a substantial commercial office lease in Manhattan for a very well-known tenant. That lease was so substantial that my negotiation was praised in *The New York Law Journal*. P.S. - I also got to go to Wimbledon that year and sat in the players box, a true thrill!

What challenge are you most proud of overcoming?

In July 2017, I, and everyone else in my office building, evacuated our offices due to a steam blast explosion at Grand Central Station. I left my bag, cell phone, pending work and escrow checks in the office while running down the stairs as windows were breaking around us. We could not return for 40 days. With no notice, I immediately pivoted and opened a home office by walking to Best Buy and buying a new laptop and printer; I set up new phone lines (remember drop lines?). I commandeered a friend's cell phone until I was able to retrieve my own and changed the voicemail to "Stop and listen to this message". Those were days before back-ups and redundancies were commonplace, and scans were barely on the radar. I was swamped workwise, so I had no time to panic. Every client wanted their deal to be attended to, regardless of my situation. A neighbor in my apartment building gave me \$100, as I had no emergency cash. (I later returned the money with a bottle of Scotch.) I used my passport as ID to replace the escrow checks I left in my office with bank checks for transactions. Plus, I used an extra credit card I had at home to set up the home office. (Always keep a spare card at home.) I started a paper list of names and phone numbers until I could access my cell phone. At one point, I brought Häagen Dazs ice cream bars for the office building staff who wore full asbestos hazmat suits and climbed up and down ten flights of stairs to retrieve our personal effects. (Con Ed had turned the power off). They were so appreciative as no one had thanked them for their efforts or just brought them anything in the heat of the summer. Surviving the Steam Blast Explosion was the toughest challenge of my solo-preneurship.

Tell us about a recent professional accomplishment of yours.

I handled a *pro bono* matter for a community that was facing an unwieldy expansion by a religious institution acting along the lines of *ask for forgiveness, not for permission*. This institution broke every city guideline, sought variances that were in direct contravention to their deed restrictions, and built a commercial kitchen when none was allowed. It was a heavily followed case in New York City. Many other religious institutions were trying to do the same thing and planned

to use the city's stamp of approval on this expansion occurring *under the radar* as precedent for their own expansion. I was up against a well-known zoning attorney, but I had the facts on my side. Also, by raising community awareness, and appearing with thoughtful and specific documents evidencing the institution's complete failure to follow what they had first agreed to, I was instrumental in their having to demolish the kitchen, use the space for its intended, rather than expanded, community use, and abide by the New York City guidelines for such religious institutions.

Tell us about a recent personal accomplishment of yours.

I love to travel and last year, I coordinated a *ladies trip* to a fabulous eight-bedroom/eight-bath villa in Tuscany for seven friends and myself. Keep in mind. They were all *my* friends, and they either barely knew each other or didn't know anyone. It was a lot of pressure on me, as they all took a leap of faith and trusted me for their vacation. They had a great time meeting and getting to know each other, and some even had friends in common. We now have a new close-knit group, and a few others regretted missing out on the ten-day adventure. I am now continuing, and possibly expanding, the adventure with additional planned trips.

What advice would you offer new business owners?

Hire three professionals - an IT specialist, an accountant and an insurance agent - to set you up properly and then expand from there - social media, writing, networking, etc. You're not supposed to know everything - but make sure that the right people are on the bus when you are driving it!

How can you help other Women Owned Law members improve their businesses?

Network, network, network! In most businesses, you're only as good as tomorrow! Your prime client can merge or close and you can be without an ongoing income stream. Also, the more you give, the more you receive, so by helping others with introductions that they may need, you are helping yourself.

How has Women Owned Law been of value to you and your career?

Taking a leadership role in New York has led me to meet a number of great people. I became involved very early on, seeing the potential that this organization has, especially as it is expanding along the eastern seaboard. Additionally, serving on the national board has further introduced me to many smart and efficient professionals who have *upped* my game as well. I encourage other members to follow my example.

About Women Owned Law

Women Owned Law is a ground-breaking group created to connect and advance women legal entrepreneurs. WOL supports its members and other women entrepreneurs in the law in their business endeavors at every point in the business lifecycle. We advocate on behalf of women legal entrepreneurs and have been instrumental in raising the profile of women entrepreneurs in the law.

For additional information about Women Owned Law visit <http://www.womenownedlaw.org>