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Florence Sigal talks with Partner Hy Edelman (Submitted by Maslon)

The Secretary Who Ran a Law Firm 90 Years Ago – and Other Powerful Women at Maslon LLP

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Apr – Sep 2025

3 APR, THU

● 9am 2025 Chamber Day at

4 APR, FRI

● 7:30am Women and Wealth: Cc

8 APR, TUE

● 10am Building the Future: Le

9 APR, WED GMT-05

are subject to approval by Finance & Commerce management. To contribute contact Bill Gaier at 612-584-1537.

Stories of remarkable women in law go back many years—and at [Maslon LLP](https://maslon.com/) (<https://maslon.com/>) in Minneapolis, a proper history cannot be told without beginning with Florence Schlasinger Sigal.

Sigal earned a law degree in 1932 from the Minnesota College of Law, one of the schools that eventually merged into what is now Mitchell Hamline. Her parents were Russian immigrants who settled in the tiny town of Streeter, N.D., after escaping the pogroms against Jews in Odessa. But because women were rarely hired as attorneys in those days, she didn't practice law; instead, upon graduation, Sigal worked as an executive secretary for Samuel Maslon. For the next half century she “ran the firm” that still bears his name, said longtime Maslon attorney Bill Pentelovitch, who worked with Sigal in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s.

“She hired and fired all staff members other than lawyers; decided raises and bonuses for staff members; oversaw all the financial, file-keeping, and administrative aspects of the firm; and even decided when and how much the partners would receive as draws,” Pentelovitch said. “We didn't get regular paychecks in those days—Florence distributed money whenever she felt there was enough in the bank to do so.”

Maslon reflected on Sigal's story when, in November, the firm received one of just nine 2023 Empowering Women awards from Finance & Commerce. Maslon has been steadfast in supporting and advancing its remarkable women attorneys and staff, whose collective influence, impact, and leadership in both the profession and the community is profound. Terri Krivosha was elected chair of the firm in 2003, becoming the first female chair of a top 25 Twin Cities law firm. Keiko Sugisaka carries the standard forward as Maslon's current chair. Suzette Allaire serves as chief operating officer and executive committee member, and women partners have been appointed as firm practice group leaders for many years.

Arguably, it all started with Florence Sigal.

Having smart business leaders alongside practicing attorneys has been a longstanding tradition at Maslon, long before sophisticated legal operations were common. And though she wasn't an attorney, Sigal clearly wielded a great deal of power at the Maslon firm. If you wanted to see Sam Maslon, you had to go through Sigal, “and she wouldn't always let people in to talk to him,” Pentelovitch said.

When Sigal gave birth to twin girls in 1942, she quit her job. Within a few weeks, she got a call from Sam Maslon. He told her, “I can't manage this,” said Sigal's daughter, Ronnie Hartman. If she returned to work, he said, “I will pay for a housekeeper,” and he did. Florence remained in her position until Maslon's death in 1988, and then handled the administration of his estate.

By that time, women had rightfully begun joining the ranks of Maslon attorneys.

Roberta (“Bobbie”) Kaplan Levy became the first female lawyer at Maslon in 1972, out of 18 attorneys. Joanne Lynch joined her in 1973, followed by Marcy Wallace in 1975, and many others thereafter.

Levy went on to become a University of Minnesota Law School professor and, later, the first female chief judge in Hennepin County District Court.

Wallace, who as a law student was the founding editor of the William Mitchell Law Review, became Maslon's first female partner in 1978, three years after joining the firm. Wallace later established a boutique firm with her husband, former Maslon attorney John McNulty.

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(<https://finance-commerce.com/2025/04/major-redevelopment-red-wing-riverfront/>)



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4/1/2025

(<https://finance-commerce.com/2025/04/minnesota-office-to-residential-conversion-bill/>)



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The second woman to become a Maslon partner was Barbara Hauser, who joined the firm in 1978. Barbara came to Maslon after clerking for Justice Potter Stewart on the U.S. Supreme Court, making Maslon the only Twin Cities firm at the time to have two former U.S. Supreme Court law clerks (the other was Sam Maslon, who had clerked for Justice Louis Brandeis).

Wallace said Maslon was “way ahead” of its time in terms of gender equality. She attributes the more progressive attitude to the fact that the vast majority of Maslon lawyers at the time were Jewish. “They knew what it was like” to face discrimination, she said.

As noted above, Maslon elected Terri Krivosha chair of the firm in 2003. She not only became the first female managing partner of a top 25 Twin Cities law firm, she led the firm in the late 1990s to implement a groundbreaking alternative work program to help ensure attorneys had flexibility in their work-life schedule and promote gender equity.

It was something she needed herself when she joined Maslon in 1993. Her husband was serving as rabbi of a 5,000-member congregation in St. Louis Park and their two children were young. “I wanted to be involved with my kids and have a meaningful career,” she said.

After 10 years of practice, including at two prior firms, Maslon provided just the right “laboratory conditions” to allow her to develop her practice with the flexibility she needed, Krivosha said.

As a member of the recruiting committee beginning in those early days, Terri always supported the hiring and promotion of women attorneys. There wasn’t pushback, she says, adding simply, “We wanted to hire the best lawyers.”

In 2022, Keiko Sugisaka was elected chair and remains in that position. Today, more than one-third of the firm’s attorneys, and half of the firm’s leadership and senior-level management, are women.

“Maslon would not be what it is today without all of the remarkable women who’ve walked our halls,” Sugisaka said. “As a firm, we continue to be deeply committed to welcoming and advancing women attorneys and staff—not just because it’s the right thing to do, but because it has been and continues to be essential to our success.”

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