

# STEM Cells: Karen Hourigan

"Life is full of obstacles and we show our character by how we overcome them."

Erin E. Harrison, Legaltech News

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## Karen Hourigan, partner at Redgrave

**Home base:** San Francisco.

**First job:** newspaper carrier, *The Erie Times News* (Erie, Pennsylvania).

**Education:** B.A. English, B.A. Psychology, Emory University (1992); J.D., Georgetown University (1999).

**First "seat at the table:** I don't have a great answer for when I got my first seat at the table. Instead of focusing our attention on getting a seat at the table, in 2010 Redgrave built our own table. We built a unique law firm full of creative, interesting and talented people who focus our practice on Information Law. We are overseen by Managing Partner Victoria Redgrave. Women comprise 75 percent of the firm's partnership, and are the majority of our overall personnel. It

has been a foundational commitment of the firm to provide professional opportunities for women at all levels of the profession, and to invest in community initiatives that support women in business and the law. We understand that we are different and that is a conscious choice.

**Secret to your success:** I wouldn't say I have any secret plan. I think I have had success by sticking with the fundamentals by being hard-working, practical, honest and reliable. I also have had the great fortune of being surrounded by smart, innovative and motivated colleagues. Having a team of dedicated professionals beside me has been vital to any success I have had.

**First obstacle and how you overcame it:** Life is full of obstacles and we show our character by how we overcome them. As far as my legal career goes, the first obstacle I can remember is not doing as well as I hoped after my first year of law school. I thought my world was pretty much over at the time. I picked myself up, dusted myself off, continued to work hard and study hard. And, probably most importantly—I gave myself a break. While it was disappointing to not get straight A's, I knew that I truly tried my best. But I knew I needed to figure out a better way to work smarter, not harder. And I did.

**Most recent accomplishment:** Buying a house (but not in San Francisco).

**Biggest challenge:** Remaining enough of a “generalist” as a legal practitioner to be aware of legal developments, key cases, key rulings, trends in the legal world, while also focusing my practice on information law. It is usually the former that suffers, not the latter. But I think I am better equipped to provide reasonable and practical recommendations to my clients when I also am well-versed on things outside of the world of information law or e-discovery.

**Most flagrant sexism you personally encountered:** I think some of the flagrance is actually in the subtlety. Things I find inexcusable include when male counterparts won't look at me when they are speaking or won't include me in their range of vision when scanning the room; when they appear as though they are not paying attention when I am speaking; or when I am interrupted to allow a colleague to ask a question to one of my male counterparts.

**5 favorite technologies:** I am somewhat “old school”—I don't typically acquire the newest thing when it comes out. And I don't typically download the newest apps for my mobile devices. With that said, here is my throwback list of my favorite technologies because when I started my career, these things generally did not exist: (1) the Internet; (2) email; (3) iPhones; (4) lighter, quicker, more portable laptops; and (5) airport kiosks.

**What is your best tool to manage up?** I define “managing up” as showing your value to the leadership of an organization or a client by making their lives better. In a world where technology allows—if not requires—many of us to essentially be available 24/7, it can be challenging to set boundaries or manage expectations. That said, there are certain issues or questions that arise that don't have an easy answer or a quick fix. Instead, they require listening, understanding, and reflection. Knowing when to slow down and focus and not multi-task is an important skill, and something I use at the appropriate times to earn and build trust and respect.

**Who was your most important mentor, and why:** It is very difficult to pick a “most important “mentor. Three people or entities have had the greatest impact on my legal career and influence on me as an attorney. First, there was professor Brad Rothermel at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. I went there for a year after college and had professor Rothermel for two classes. He once was the athletic director at UNLV and, at the time, I was interested in a career in college sports administration. He recommended that I go to law school because it would be a useful degree to have for that profession, and if I ever changed my mind, at least I would have a law degree to fall back on. After my time in Las Vegas, I moved to Washington, D.C., where I worked first as a temp and then as an employee of the law firm of Williams & Connolly. I worked with a team of attorneys who were outstanding mentors to me by showing me how to work as a lawyer and what it means to have uncompromising quality standards. It was some of the best training I could have had. Then, of course, I have to pay respects to Jonathan Redgrave. I met him on my very first day at Jones Day-DC in October 2001 and, in large part, we have worked together ever since. I would not be at Redgrave if it weren't for Jonathan. His passion for information law is compelling. I have learned a lot from him and by working with him. Very few questions that clients ask me are easy to answer—if they were, I probably would focus my practice on a different area of law. Jonathan always has been a fantastic sounding board who helps me work through some of the thorniest questions and helps me feel comfortable about identifying risks; as well as ways to mitigate the risks with practical solutions.

**Advice for the next generation:** Put your phones down and communicate. Engage people. Share stories. Look people in the eye. Learn the art of telling a story and communicating with others.

**Pull out the checkbook/Paypal:** (favorite charities): Best Friends Animal Society.

## **BALANCING TIPS**

**How do you recharge your batteries:** I try to set boundaries; I don't always have my phone with me. I try to exercise regularly. I try to go to Donner Lake for a week in the summer. I also have family in Ireland whom I visit at least once a year. They have a completely different lifestyle and time table than what I have in the U.S., which allows (if not forces) me to slow down and soak it all in.

**Book that changed your life:** Walden.

**Your mantra:** Life is all about choices.

**Favorite quote:** "Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind." - Dr. Seuss

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