

Poker Night

At Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel, making sure women are 'at the table.'

By Kerri Ann Law and Jennifer Rochon

- Be more of a risk-taker.
- Practice making "high-stakes" decisions.
- Hone your negotiation skills.
- Learn how to spot a "tell."
- Broaden your professional network.
- Have fun and socialize.

So read the invitation to Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel's Women's Poker Night, sent to prominent women in the fields of law and business. Instead of a typical cocktail party or golf outing, Kramer Levin women wanted to do something different. They wanted to create a unique event where professional women could come together in a relaxed setting and take away some business tips as well as perhaps a few new contacts.

The skills previewed on the invitation apply equally to winning in poker and succeeding in the courtroom and the boardroom. Business people are constantly negotiating, assessing risks, and trying to read their competition. High-powered decisions and deals require quick thinking and confidence, just like determining whether to raise the stakes in poker or go "all in." An event for women combining these skills was an immediate "draw."

Recognizing that women often juggle numerous responsibilities at work and home that make an evening event particularly challenging, the event's organizers believed it was important that the event be meticulously planned to ensure its success and maximize its value to the attendees. Several things were done to ensure this. The Women's Initiative Committee collected lists of women clients and potential clients from both men and women attorneys throughout the firm. Invitations were sent with personalized hand-written messages. The response rate was unprecedented.

To lay the groundwork for the event, the firm's women attorneys were invited to a panel discussion led by a diverse group of lawyers within the firm who spoke about networking, working a room, and forming relationships with clients. Each Kramer Levin attendee also was given a package of materials, including networking tips, the names and titles of every expected attendee, brief summaries about the representative companies at-

tending, and a preassigned list of people to endeavor to meet during the evening. Poker tables were also carefully assigned to facilitate connections.

On Oct. 17, 2007, more than 140 prominent female business executives and lawyers gathered at the Penn Club to put their negotiation and high-stakes decision-making skills to the test. More than 50 companies were represented.

After sipping cocktails, the women were seated at poker tables and participated in an interactive workshop led by Ellen Leikind, a former business executive and founder of Poker Prima Divas. Located in New York, Poker Prima Divas conducts formal poker tournaments and presentations designed to empower and entertain women by instructing them on how to play poker while stressing the related invaluable business skills.

Consistent with this theme, each woman received a poker reference guide embossed with the motto "if you want to be in the game, you have to be at the table," a package of cards with poker tips on each card, and a stack of chips. Ms. Leikind reiterated the similarities between poker and business in terms of calling someone's bluff during negotiations, being appropriately aggressive, and holding out for the best "deal." After some practice, a Texas Hold 'Em tournament, one of the most popular poker games, was held.

In lieu of prizes, the top five tournament winners selected charities to which donations were made. The firm distributed embossed Zagat restaurant guides as parting gifts to encourage women to get out there and "go to lunch." The firm's attorneys and external guests said they chose to attend this event over several other invitations despite their tight schedules because the committee had chosen a unique way to combine fun and business.

The committee members learned some valuable lessons for future events. First, choose a unique theme or venue to distinguish the event from the plethora of invitations we all receive. Second, get the whole firm excited. The participation and backing of the entire firm is crucial. And, third, plan meticulously so that the attorneys and clients obtain the maximum value for their time.



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