

SILICON VALLEY BUSINESS JOURNAL



Anne Cappella

Partner | Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP

KATE EVANS
Contributor

Anne Cappella is not your typical lawyer. This is a woman who rewired her entire house – by herself. Her undergraduate degree in electrical engineering and time spent as an engineer at IBM prepared her in a unique way to be a leading Silicon Valley attorney. Her background allows her to perform engineering interviews, review technical documents, and understand patent, intellectual property, and merger and acquisition litigation.

Cappella prefers practicing law to engineering, though, as she gets to learn about new technology and the patent history that made it possible. She has also been a lead member of the pro bono Weil team that achieved the landmark settlement in the federal class action ending indeterminate, long-term solitary confinement in California state prisons.

As she continues to impact Silicon Valley through her law practice and fight for human rights with her pro bono work, she also mentors and supports fellow women as they navigate their own careers. After all, she says, “it is good to have a posse.”

Residence: Redwood City

Education: B.S., electrical engineering, Southern Methodist University; J.D., University of Texas, Austin

Where were you born? Naperville, Illinois

How long have you been in this line of work? 20 years.

Job description: Cappella’s practice bridges both litigation and transactional matters, which include advising clients on pre-litigation patent strategies, patent licensing, patent acquisitions and intellectual property due diligence for merger and acquisitions transactions. On her litigation matters, Cappella has extensive experience representing clients in complex multi-patent and multi-district litigations.

Originally an engineer for IBM, Ms. Cappella uses her electrical engineering degree to advise on areas of technology such as wireless communications, semiconductors, and audio/video encoding.

Company description: Founded in 1931, Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP has been a provider of legal services for more than 80 years. With approximately 1,100 lawyers in 20 offices worldwide, Weil has established a geographic footprint that has allowed the firm to partner with clients wherever they do business.

Employees: 1,100 attorneys.

Career path: My engineering background and work as an engineer and consultant at IBM has provided a solid platform for me to work as an intellectual property attorney. I draw from these experiences to perform engineering interviews, review technical documents, and advise clients.

Current civic/community involvement: I am currently leading Weil’s pro bono efforts as part of the team that achieved a landmark settlement in the federal class action ending indeterminate, long-term solitary confinement in all California state prisons. The Weil team, along with the Center for Constitutional Rights and many prisoner activist organizations, are in the moni-

toring phase now that the class action settlement has been approved.

I am involved in the Women in Law Hackathon for Weil. This is a project sponsored by the Diversity Lab, Stanford Law School, and Bloomberg Law that challenges leaders in diversity across the country to compete in teams to pitch unique solutions to the lack of women leaders in law. I also support Chief IP counsel, an organization that was founded by women heads of patents and intellectual property from major technology companies in Silicon Valley with the mission of supporting and promoting the advancement, development and retention of women in technology and intellectual property. I am currently working with them to develop a program with the Girl Scouts to earn IP badges.

What was your first job? Working at a recycling center.
Growing up, you wanted to be: A detective.

The best advice you’ve ever received: Treat everyone with respect, no matter who they are. The world is a much smaller place than I ever imagined and the intellectual property legal field, even more so. My network has grown over the years by maintaining connections with colleagues, clients, and even opposing counsel. I remember my first mentor seemingly knew everyone and I was honored when someone said that they felt I was one of those people. Plus, it makes life so much richer to learn from a diverse group of people.

Your best advice for others: Build a support network. I was a fiercely independent person growing up. It was not until I entered the legal field that I understood the power of a strong women’s network. We encourage each other, provide advice, develop business together, and promote each other’s accomplishments. It is good to have a posse.

Studies I’ve read indicate that women are looked down on if they are self-promoting, but the same information from someone else is looked at favorably. Another study indicated that many women don’t think that they have what it takes for promotion because they don’t already have the right experience – the support network is great at overcoming those thoughts through their encouragement and some good planning to make sure you have the right opportunities.

Something about you that would surprise others: I was the homecoming queen nominee for Southern Methodist University and was elected to the court. It was a strange experience for me on many levels. SMU was under the football death penalty in 1987, so the ceremony took place in a half condemned soccer stadium. I was taking a heavy load of engineer courses and had to skip classes and move an exam to accommodate fashion shows and women’s fundraisers. My engineering professors were inquisitive as to why there were signs in the engineering school to vote for me for “HCQ” – what was that?

Also, I replaced all the wiring in my old house. My degree as an engineer didn’t prepare me for this task, but I was able to figure out the regulations. When the inspector came, he thought that I was a professional, but I insisted that I was an attorney doing this for the



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first time to make sure he looked at everything thoroughly.

Who is your hero/mentor? My husband, Mike Cappella. Mike has encouraged me and helped coach me along the way. His insight and advice that he gained while working at a variety of big and small companies has been invaluable.

What has been your biggest challenge professionally? This is quite cliché, but it is balancing workload and life outside the office.

You are a woman who has assumed a top leadership role. What needs to happen to get more women in corporate leadership roles? If there are few women in an organization, we need to get men in senior positions engaged. Having senior men take ownership/responsibility of promoting and retaining women has a significant number of benefits: they can make or bend the rules, gives authenticity to any initiatives, and sets an example for how others in the organization should behave. Once those efforts take root, there will be more women with the skills, sponsorships, and network to rise higher in the organization. Once there are more women in senior positions, studies show that helps with the promotion of more women.

How many hours a week do you average at work? 60

What motivates you to get out of bed in the morning? I love what I do and the people I work with. One of the things that I’ve liked the most is learning new technologies and talking with engineers. I’ve learned more technology as a lawyer than I did as an engineer. As an engineer you are developing a product over a long period of time, while as an attorney, I may be required to learn multiple technologies. I not only learn the current technology that is being accused of infringement, but also the technology described in the patent and the history of technology that came before it.

Your favorite gadget: iPhone. It seems like it can do just about everything!

What would you like to accomplish in the next year? I would like to be part of efforts that help with the retention and promotion of women in the law.

If you weren’t doing what you do now, what would it be? A high school aptitude test showed that I was equally interested in science and theater. I choose an engineering scholarship over a costume design scholarship. While I have always thought that opening a yarn shop would be interesting, I am afraid that the scientist in me would win out and I would be an architect.

What are you concerned about? Keeping up with demands on my time.

How do you unwind? Yoga.

Your guilty pleasure: Good wine.