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# Meet the local lawyers looking to boost women in the patent world

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Women in Business

By [Lauren Coffey](#) - TBBJ & Inno Reporter

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Boosting female representation in STEM — or the science, technology, engineering and math fields — is nothing new. But a new effort is taking place that boosts women in STEM beyond the traditional fields.

"Women are in a strong minority when it comes to being intellectual property lawyers and patent holders," said [Mindi Richter](#), a partner at Shumaker. "We do a lot to continue to improve on that and it is improving; but it's a slow moving process."

Richter runs the intellectual property group for Shumaker across Florida, dealing with patents, litigating them and working with the IP lawyers across the firm. She has been outspoken on trying to boost women on both sides of the patent fence — there's the patent and IP lawyers, and also the female founders securing more patents.



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Mindi Richter, Shumaker partner and intellectual property and technology regional service line leader.  
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According to Shumaker, 65% of IP lawyers are men, while the other 35% are women. Part of it starts at an early age; in order to be in the IP legal field, lawyers have to have an undergraduate degree in a science-related field.

"It starts with educating young women early on, on what the different options are," Richter said, adding this has been an issue she's seen since she began practicing law in 2004.

[Sheryl Hunter](#), a shareholder at Trenam Law and corporate and securities attorney focused on technology, agrees education has begun in terms of bringing awareness and needs to start young.

"This will come naturally from more intentional efforts to start in lower schools, as well to break this tendency toward fear of math and science," Hunter said. "Soon girls may get more comfortable with those skills sets — and many naturally have those skill sets — but culturally we've created some gender fears."



Sheryl Hunter, a corporate/securities/M&A attorney and shareholder at Trenam Law.  
Trenam Law

More women becoming IP lawyers and familiar in the patent world can extend beyond simple representation. It can help protect businesses as a whole.

"If you're a business attorney like I am, even when you're setting up a company you have to have the knowledge and ability to issue spot, to protect the brand," Hunter said. "If you do not have these skill sets, you have to work with someone else who does — or it's just going to be a little limiting to counsel your clients. It's important for women to go into these fields, to have a broader breadth of women that have the experience and can be put on teams. Is it essential? No. It's just more of a gap."

On the flip side, there also needs to be more representation with patent holders. According to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, only 13% of patent holders are women, despite roughly half of startups being woman-owned.

"I think women think less about commercializing their inventions and ideas; they do things because they see a need and want to make an improvement." Richter said. "Sometimes, it takes an extra push to see 'Have you thought about getting funding for that?' And some of it is gender bias and having less access to recourses and funding in general."

Both women acknowledge things will not change overnight, with Richter stating patents themselves can take decades to receive. In the interim, she's working with the University of South Florida and other female-focused entrepreneurial groups in the Tampa Bay region.

"I think [the low numbers are] a number of different factors; it's not just one thing we can point to," she said. "Which is maybe why it's tough to get the number to jump up faster."

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