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Celebrating Sheila Block

It would be challenging to sum up a career as remarkable as Sheila Block's in just a few words. A once-in-a-generation legal talent, revered mentor, female trailblazer, and recipient of countless awards and accolades—including being appointed to the Order of Canada—are just some of the defining features of Sheila's nearly five-decade long career.

The Advocates' Journal paid tribute to her in [a feature article](#), capturing a selection of some of her career highlights and sharing personal reflections and anecdotes from colleagues, mentors and mentees, past and present.

A career as long and as accomplished as Sheila's is not achieved without dedication and a steadfast work ethic. "When the file demands, Sheila is the first in the office and the last to leave," the article states. But work ethic alone cannot be the source of the "secret sauce" that makes Sheila the advocate she is.

"At her core she's a storyteller," says partner [Andrew Bernstein](#) in the article. "And she believes that those stories and those narratives are what move decision-makers." Her ability to draw judges into her analysis with plain-spoken persuasion and personality, according to former Supreme Court Justice Rosalie Abella, "ropes you in early and keeps you through the argument. If you are listening, she makes you want to hear her."

Read: [Sheila Block appointed to the Order of Canada](#)

Throughout her career, Sheila has been a formal and informal mentor to countless junior lawyers, both within Torys and in the wider legal community, including around the world through various teaching appointments. A champion of supporting women lawyers and advancing equity, diversity and inclusion in the profession, Sheila's efforts have impacted areas such as women in the Canadian bar, access to justice and several pro bono causes.

Partner [Sarah Whitmore](#) recalls memories of Sheila when they worked together on a case in Sarah's first year of practice.

"She was just one of us, brainstorming what we were going to do," Sarah says. "She was decisive about what do to but in a way that made it feel like we are all doing this together. She wanted to know what each of us thought."

This collaborative and humanistic approach has become a hallmark of Sheila's professional approach. She is known to place trust in her colleagues, no matter how junior, to get the best results for her clients while maintaining authentic relationships with her team.

"People who know Sheila by reputation would be surprised at how accessible she is," says partner [Molly Reynolds](#), a long-time mentee of Sheila's.

"If you want to talk to her about struggling with your career path or a fight with your spouse, she is there because she treats everyone like a colleague—she is really there for the human beings in her firm."

Read: [Sheila Block receives the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Canadian Law Awards](#)

As a woman in law, Sheila's career has also been characterized by firsts. As one of the first two women lawyers to join Torys in the seventies (and later one of the first two women partners), Sheila has blazed a trail for women litigators at Torys and across the country. As the article states, "She had to break through the barriers so other women wouldn't have to."

When Sheila first began her career in 1972, “only 5 percent of the lawyers in Ontario were women,” the piece explains. They also “made significantly less than their male counterparts” and were generally limited to practice areas such as marital disputes, estate planning or residential real estate.

At the firm, “[a] client complained to the senior relationship partner about having a woman assigned to the file,” and then-Torys partner Bob Armstrong and the senior relationship partner “met for a few minutes, considered the complaint, and decided to fire the client. The client retracted his complaint”. Despite the odds, Sheila’s talent was, simply put, undeniable, and she quickly rose to great acclaim, carving out long-overdue space for women in a male-dominated profession.

Throughout her career, Sheila has been recognized by all manner of ranking indices, publications and professional organizations for her tremendous work, including in *Chambers Canada*, *Chambers Global*, *Benchmark Litigation*, *Lexpert*, *The Legal 500*, *Best Lawyers*, and more.

Her reputation precedes her—but as those who have had the pleasure of knowing and working with her know, Sheila is not motivated by accolades. With a true passion for advocacy, it is her unwavering dedication to her colleagues, her clients, and the profession that will define Sheila’s legacy in the years to come.

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