

CELEBRITY LAWYERS

Meet Michelle Suskauer



High-profile defense criminal lawyer, mother, wife, law partner and TV news reporter for CNN, NBC, MSNBC, The Today Show, Good Morning America and NBC Nightly News, to name a few.

It's 5:00 p.m. in Florida. Cooking dinner, Michelle Suskauer gives SUE her thoughts on being a national TV reporter and balancing a busy practice and happy home life.

ON WORK

'Way back when, I did med/mal but I realized the thrill of criminal defense. Every case came alive because it was about an individual. Time goes quickly and you are never bored. Every person is different. You are their teacher, social worker, their mom. You wear so many hats.

ON PARTNERING WITH HER HUSBAND

Most people cannot work with a spouse. We created one world so the two worlds can't collide. We're truly partners. Mostly, we do our own cases but have tried murder cases together. We really compliment each other. I have a much higher profile. He's fine with it.

FAMILY LIFE

We don't talk about work at dinner with the kids around. We talk about cases in bed. My girls, 12 and 10, do not want to be lawyers. That's fine. They're not going to inherit the Suskauer law firm, at least at this age. We do tend to talk about work at home. Sometimes the lines are blurry. You are always working together. On vacation, it's hard to relax.

BEING A LAWYER

It's how you spin the facts. When the jury has a verdict, your heart is in your throat. My clients benefit by my 17 years in establishing good solid relationships with lawyers and prosecutors. Your reputation is everything.

It's a lot more challenging to be the defense lawyer than to point your finger. A jury sits there thinking the defendant did something wrong. The presumption is of guilt. The most common question I get is, "How can you defend someone you know is guilty?" It's not my job to be a judge.

APPEARING ON TV

Years ago, I was interviewed about a boating accident under the influence causing a death. I told the station I was interested in being their legal analyst. I started with a story about Rush Limbaugh on drugs. When you get in the Rolodex and prove yourself, they start using you and using you a lot.

But it's feast or famine. I handle big legal stories like Anna Nicole Smith or Caylee Anthony. If it's the Olympics or the financial crisis, you won't see me. I also had a radio show: The Suskauer Show.

TALKING WITH HER KIDS

It's not a big deal for my kids to see me on TV anymore. There are a lot of subjects I prefer they not watch. It's hard enough that they know what we do, particularly if our clients are charged with hurting children. We have had very difficult conversations with them and tell them why we are not prosecutors. They know that we really help people.

MAKING MONEY

It doesn't rise to the level of corporate litigator or partner in a big firm. There are sacrifices but we still have a house and do things like take vacations. If we couldn't make a living, we wouldn't do it.

TOUGHEST CHALLENGES

You cannot save people from themselves. We have a lot of clients who have addiction issues, whether sexual, alcohol, or mental health. You do the best you can but sometimes people make the wrong decisions.

WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

Women get a fair shake on TV. Look at all of the women anchors: Campbell Brown, Nancy Grace, Lisa Bloom, Greta Van Susteren.

HOW WOMEN LAWYERS ARE PERCEIVED

Judges used to call me by my first name. At my first trial, I was asked if I was a clerk. You get your dander up. We're constantly trying to prove that we are just as good if not better. Look at the number of women partners - not so good.

EXPANDING THE CAREER

I love what I do. I see myself continuing for awhile and doing more media. I love either TV or radio. It's incredibly exciting. I'm also looking forward to being President of the West Palm Beach County Bar Association.

HOW TO MAKE IT

Speak your mind. Visit my website and see me fighting with Bill O'Reilly. Associate with other strong women. Get involved in your bar association and women lawyer groups because there is strength in numbers. Things will change because women support other women.

WHAT'S NEXT

I have to be at Headline CNN at 6:30.