



Susan Jones Knape wins MTMP's Legal Services Innovation Award

Susan Jones Knape: MTMP Legal Services Innovation Award Winner

Meet the former model, single mom, law firm CMO, and now founder and president of A Case for Women who says innovation is what she was born to do.

by Sara G. Stephens, Legal Content Director, Levin Papantonio Rafferty

Susan Jones Knape knows she is no accidental tourist in the life she now leads. Everything she is today came from what she senses as a strong guiding force. From her upbringing by a traditional Southern mother to the deep-rooted faith that took hold in her teens, and even some tragedies she'd just as soon not discuss, the Susan that storms through life today with such bright purpose emanated from 40 rich years of brewing life experiences.

Susan's life has taken more turns than a Texas twister, but they are far from random changes in direction. Rather, they reflect Susan's innate ability to innovate. She attunes herself to what is going on around her, assesses how it sits with her, and adapts—herself, her surroundings, her situation—to make things better, not only for herself but also for others and for the world at large.

So, what does it mean when a person like Susan—someone with so many experiences under her belt—receives an acknowledgment for innovation?

"Innovation is at the core of my DNA," she said. "It's what I'm meant to do."

Making the Legal Space Softer and More Approachable

Susan added that in the legal space, innovation is especially important.

Take, for example, A Case for Women LLC, the company Susan founded and for which she currently serves as president. This company is the nation's leader in advocacy for women who need contingency fee legal services. Susan launched the business seven years ago with her daughter and co-founder, Jordan Knape, who now oversees technology and operations (daughter August Knape also works with the company in the area of ensuring criteria are well-defined and scientifically concordant.)

Susan said the "lightbulb" that prompted this innovative service switched on while she worked as Chief Marketing Officer for

Baron & Budd. She had already worked at the firm for 11 years when she came to the realization that the people who contacted the firm for legal help were usually women. This was true even in cases when the injury had befallen a man.

Despite this reality, the legal advertising of this time had a decidedly male-centric vibe.

Now, in Susan's eyes, women are the "gatekeepers of families across every demographic in America." She instantly saw an opportunity to turn legal advertising on its head—and attract new clients in the process—by speaking a language that resonated with women.

This is why A Case for Women's marketing and intake language thrives on words like "personal empowerment," "advocacy," "legal literacy," and "the power to create meaningful change." The words are striking a definite chord with women who are ready to affect change in themselves and in the corporate bodies and institutions. The company's message is indeed resonating, and its Facebook following of more than 200,000 fans proves it.

Celebrating the Power to Affect Change

More important, A Case for Women is making a difference in how many women (and men) perceive the legal space. Susan admitted that when she was first approached to handle marketing for Baron & Budd (18 years ago) law firm, she was not inclined to do so. "I had a negative perception of lawyers, partly because of the lawyer jokes, but also because the commercials that ran on late-night TV were not very enlightened," she said.



Susan Jones Knape with her two daughters—Jordan Knape, who is co-founder of A Case for Women, and August Knape, who also works with the company.

"I saw the legal space as being pretty staid and not welcome to innovation."

Susan said much has changed since then, but that many plaintiffs still don't see how important the legal space is not only for individuals who have been harmed but also for society as a whole.

"We use the lever of money to create change, but that's not widely understood by many plaintiffs. So, we educate people that because of this lever, big changes have happened in the world," Susan said. "Talc powder has been reformulated, Essure birth control is off the market, and Michigan is paying tons of money to women injured by Larry Nassar."

Because A Case for Women has tossed out the "aggressive, here's all your money, male-oriented approach," and replaced it with softer, gentler, easy-to-understand messaging that helps women feel comfortable stepping forward, tens of thousands of women who would never have gone for those other messages have responded to the organization, taken legal action, and changed their lives. "So, innovation for me really means we've been able to reach people who otherwise wouldn't have responded to traditional law firm messages," Susan said. "Innovation means everything to me because without that change, these people wouldn't have gotten the help they needed, and potentially some of the bad products that were on the market would still be on the market, and some of the practices like Rideshare Safety would not have been implemented."

Creating Solution if One Doesn't Exist

Susan described the vision she and her daughter Jordan had for A Case for Women when they were first starting the organization. They wanted it to provide an experience for the client unlike any other experience provided by any law firm or marketing company. "We wanted the client to feel cocooned the whole way through as if

A Case for Women had its arms around you and was caring for you through the whole experience," she said.

This sense of caring had to extend through every touch point for the client, including the intake process. Susan looked for the right intake group or call center to which she could outsource this important work, but nobody fit the bill. So she and Jordan built it themselves.

"We combine high touch with high tech," Susan explained. "Sometimes a potential client wants to talk, and other times, particularly with cases of sexual assault, they prefer to text. We go with whatever the person is comfortable with, but we make it a safe space to earn their trust."

"Through empathy and caring, we give them their next step."

Adding to her repertoire of positive innovation, Susan recently developed A Case for Justice, a "brother" brand to A Case for Women that comes into play when it is strategic to reach men directly.

Together, Susan and her two daughters oversee 60 men and women across the country who share the Knapes' passion to change the world. Susan is also the president of A Fund for Women, a 501(c)(3) that assists women in immediate financial need.

As for what comes next for this innovative individual, Susan is open to what the universe speaks to her.

"I've never met a new idea I didn't like," she said. Her interest is drawn, however, to one type of situation in which women who are disproportionately hurt—the big business of divorce.

We can't wait to see what she does.

To learn more about Susan's fascinating life of innovation, listen to her podcast interview on Lawful Good (<https://lawfulgoodpodcast.com/s2-e05-susan-jones-knape/>). If you are interested in learning more about A Case for Women visit acaseforwomen.com or email Susan at susan@acaseforwomen.com.