


# SHE MAKES HER STORY

North Valley Magazine spoke with female entrepreneurs from diverse industries to get their take on their paths to success. These businesswomen discuss their pivotal moments and decisions that changed the trajectories of their careers.

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# ‘Can’t Imagine Doing *Anything* Else’

## Estate attorney approaches work with empathy, touch of humor

By Alison Stanton



Allison Kierman began practicing law in 2005 and opened Kierman Law in March 2017. *(Dennis Murphy/Contributor)*

Growing up in a small ranching and farming town in Texas, Allison Kierman remembers often hearing the phrase, “You’d have to sell the farm to pay the taxes.”

“This always resonated with me. So, I think I always knew I wanted to be an estate attorney,” says Kierman, managing partner at Kierman Law in Scottsdale.

Kierman’s grandparents also helped influence her decision to get into estate planning.

“They told me I could be a doctor, a lawyer or a teacher. Growing up with them really inspired me,” she says, adding that although her grandparents have passed away, her family is still working through their trust and various business structures to maximize the assets and minimize the family’s tax burden.

Kierman, who began practicing law in 2005, opened Kierman Law in March 2017.

“Generally, I practice estate planning — meaning wills, trusts, powers of attorney, and guardianship,” she says. “I also work in estate and trust administration, which is helping families figure out exactly what it means to transfer assets upon the death of a loved one.

“And I work in probate court when assets are not held in a trust and court cases must be opened.”

One of the best things about being an estate attorney, Kierman says, is she gets to work mostly with families, as well as small businesses, that are growing or transitioning to becoming a family partnership.

“I really care about my clients. I listen to what they have to say and what they care about, and I draft the estate plan that works for them and matches their goals,” she says.

Kierman is aware that the idea of planning for what happens after death can be sad and even overwhelming for many of her clients.

She says she tries to keep the mood light when speaking about her services.

“We laugh a lot during my client meetings,” she says. “I try to focus on the funny and ridiculous aspects, like what

happens when your wife remarries her tennis coach, to keep things light hearted."

Kierman also understands that, because the idea of estate planning can be challenging for people, they often put off this important task.

"Many of my clients start our meetings by saying, 'I'm embarrassed to admit we haven't done this yet,'" she says, adding that she always reassures clients there is no need to feel that way.

"The good news is that they didn't need it yet, but obviously that sentiment only lasts so long," she continues. "At some point, we all need a plan. Death is one of the only unavoidable facts of life."

One of the most common myths surrounding estate planning, Kierman says, is that people believe they don't have enough money for a trust or an estate plan.

When she meets with clients who feel this way, Kierman explains how trusts and plans are not just about what assets they may or may not have.

"They are about simplifying things for your surviving loved ones and making things easier for them," she says. "For instance, if you own a house, it's often a good idea to put the house in trust to avoid probate."

An example of this advice occurred recently when Kierman met with new clients who had learned some sobering and surprising news.

"Through new DNA testing, they found out the husband had a child he didn't know about. The wife was smart to realize they are now considered a blended family," she says.

To ensure that the wife did not lose any rights to the couple's assets, Kierman says they put together an estate plan, despite the fact that the clients did not own a great deal.

When she is not at the law office, Kierman enjoys spending as much time as she can with her two kids, ages 10 and 12.

"We love to hike, travel, listen to music, and play games," she says. "We have two labradoodles, and we take nightly walks or swims with them. I'm always looking for a new adventure for my family."

Looking back, Kierman says she is pleased that she followed her grandparents' advice as well as her own gut feeling to get into estate planning.

"I love hearing my clients' stories — where they are from, what they've learned, what they did successfully or unsuccessfully with their families or businesses," she says. "I think I learn as much during my client meetings as they do."

Kierman is also very appreciative of the many referrals she gets from her clients, adding that it always "makes (my) heart smile" to know that someone enjoyed working with her enough to share her name with someone else.

"A woman recently came to me as a client. She said she was referred to me by a friend. She then told another friend she was seeing her estate attorney and the second friend said, 'Oh, no, you must see my attorney.' Lucky for me, both friends were clients and both sent the new client my way," Kierman says. "Sometimes it's really a small world."

While Kierman knows she specializes in an area of law that can be challenging for her clients at time to face, she knows she is helping them with a very important task."

"I can't imagine doing anything else, honestly. I offer a service that my clients will 100% use at some point in their lives," she says.

Kierman Law is located at 14362 N. Frank Lloyd Wright Boulevard, Suite 1000, in Scottsdale. For more information, call 480-719-7333 or visit kiermanlaw.com.


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