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MEDIA MENTIONS

At Barnes & Thornburg's 8th Annual Women In Leadership Event, A Focus On Female Empowerment And Friendship

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"During last year's opening remarks at our annual leadership event," remembers [Connie Lahn](#), managing partner of Barnes & Thornburg's Minneapolis office, "I gave a shout out to someone who'd told me they had made a really great friend at the event. Afterward, I got email after email from other women who wanted to let me know the same thing: they'd met an amazing friend here, or a colleague, or someone who helped them find a job or get through a tough time."

Those moments served as inspiration for the 2019 Women in Leadership: Exploring Pathways event, the firm's eighth annual, at the Nicollet Island Pavilion in Minneapolis, which Lahn decided to center on the importance of female friendship. "I wanted to think about how we can help build each other up rather than feed into the toxic myths that women can't support one another," she said.

Sharing stories — and lessons about supporting women

To this end, Lahn enlisted [Dr. Tererai Trent](#) to be the keynote speaker for this year's event. Dr. Trent is not only Oprah's "All-Time Favorite Guest" — besting even Tom Cruise — but an internationally renowned scholar, humanitarian and author whose passion is the fight for quality education for girls and women around the world.

Dr. Trent took attendees on her journey from rural Zimbabwe and an oppressive early marriage, to her 20-year quest to get an American higher education, to the work she does today building schools and forging partnerships to create sustainable business ecosystems in impoverished

communities.

It all started when Jo Luck, now president and CEO of Heifer International, visited her village and told a young Dr. Trent, “If you believe in your dreams, they are achievable.” Thus began Dr. Trent’s decades-long struggle to redefine her own life and fulfill her dream to better the lives of women and girls around the world. “The best investment anyone can make is in education for women and girls,” she told the more than 175 attendees. “They’re going to change the world whether you like it or not.”

Though her experience is far from that of a Western woman in a corporate setting, many of the lessons Dr. Trent spoke of apply all the same: ground yourself in daily rituals; write down your dreams; find meaning in bettering the lives of others; and rather than simply donating money, become a partner in other women’s success.

And, perhaps most importantly, Dr. Trent made a call for those in the room to come together as women. “Women need the energy to rise together. But we’ve got to talk like sisters. We’ve got to look at one another and say, ‘I see you’ and ‘I am here to be seen.’ We can heal this world,” she said.

Empowering women (and their friendships) at Barnes & Thornburg

These lessons — and Dr. Trent’s story — were what attracted Lahn to Dr. Trent in the first place. They’re also part and parcel with recent women-focused initiatives at Barnes & Thornburg. For instance, the firm now has an internal task force devoted to such issues, like how to get more women in leadership roles. Barnes & Thornburg’s new parental leave policy, which offers 16 weeks for all new parents, is just one significant result of this task force.

But the group does more than simply talk shop. They also do things like getting together socially during the annual partner’s retreat to simply chat about what’s going on their lives. A supportive social and work environment, especially among women, is crucial to changing behaviors that incite unnecessary competition. As Lahn explains, “My son had a video presentation at two in the afternoon yesterday. So I told everyone, ‘I’m going to be at a third-grade video presentation, and yes, I really won’t be able to take your phone calls.’”

“If I don’t show people it’s OK to make time for themselves and their families,” Lahn said “they’ll continue with this self-defeating behavior of not just saying, ‘I have a sick kid, I need to leave early.’ I want to know those things and lead by example.”

The event concluded with the presentation of the Nancy A. Sullivan Community Leadership Award, created in memory of beloved attorney Nancy Sullivan, which recognizes a woman in the Minneapolis community who has achieved the highest level of professional excellence; exemplifies commitment to her community; is dedicated to helping others (especially women) in realizing their leadership potential; and exhibits the qualities of partnership, integrity, and perseverance. This year’s recipient was [Susan Anderson](#), senior vice president at Vision Bank, who has long been devoted to helping expand women-led businesses in the

Minneapolis community.

For more information about Barnes & Thornburg's diversity and inclusion efforts [click here](#).