
A Day in the Life of...

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How I arrived at my present job (academic and other influences): I took my first programming class in high school (FORTRAN) and earned my bachelors in CS in 1979. I knew immediately that this was for me. I bought my first hobby computer - an Atari 800-- soon after I started working as a software engineer at Rockwell International. I worked there for 3.5 years, right at the start of the microprocessor and personal computer revolution, but I had always wanted to go to law school. In addition, I worked in four different departments in my time at Rockwell, due to reorgs and being laid off. It was not very stable. I arrived at the idea of being a patent attorney because I loved technology and enjoyed writing -- the two prime requirements for a patent attorney. I got my CS masters at the same time as my law degree in 1987. I worked as a patent attorney in Washington DC for 7 years, specializing in computer and software related invention, and then moved to California to marry my current husband. (We met while on vacation in Florida). It was an easy decision to move, since I was moving to Silicon Valley in 1994, right at the beginning of the web boom. I made partner at my law firm in 1996 and am the only woman partner specializing in patent law in my law firm of 200 attorneys.

How I organize my day: Ha. Seriously. I come in, do my e-mail, voice mail, and my paper-in box, which takes about an hour. Then I do whatever short term things are required by those. Then I do whatever I have scheduled for that day. (Unless I have meetings scheduled, which overrides the above). Right now I'm working on some patent lawsuits, so a lot of my time is spent researching and reading and talking with the other members of the litigation team and our expert witnesses. (Patent suits usually involve several years of preparation before trial.) Normally, when I'm doing more writing of patent applications, I spend a lot of time talking to inventors and their managers, writing the patent applications, and preparing written responses to the Patent Office. As a partner, I also do management

tasks such as interviewing new job applicants, acting as liaison to the associate patent lawyers, and teaching in-house training courses. I also go to continuing education classes (both technical and legal) and professional meetings and seminars. I also help out the corporate lawyers with things such as due diligence IP reviews (such as when one company wants to buy another).

Amount of time spent working daily (at home and office): Almost none at home, except occasional weekends. Daily: 8-12 hours.

What I do to get myself thinking creatively: Web surf, read (I'm re-reading a lot of Dickens right now), talk to other people. I crank the stereo in my office after hours.

My problem-solving strategy: Break a problem down into as many sub-problems as possible so it won't seem so big. Write down all the sub-problems. Try to do something about those, whether it's solving them or at least taking steps toward solving them.

What I do to relieve stress: I have a little squishy squeeze ball in my desk drawer. :) I bike, contra dance, and go out with friends

My hero, mentor, or person I most admire and why: Grace Hopper. She was truly a pioneer. One of my regrets is that I didn't have a chance to meet her while she was working for Digital Equipment Corp. in the 80's and I was doing patent work for them.

What I do to mentor those who work for me: I have tried to be available to answer questions from anyone who asked and to answer those questions as best I can without commenting on the quality of the question itself. My partner used to call me "Yoda." I have also tried to get associates who work for me involved in day to day contact with clients. This means contact with both the business people and with the engineers whose patents we are working on.

How a negative event changed my life in a positive way: Being laid off at Rockwell gave me the nudge I needed to go to law school.

One event or decision in my life I wish I could go back and change: None.

What values are the most important to me and what I value in others: Loyalty, professionalism, straightforwardness.

What inspires, motivates, or gets me excited about my job on a daily basis: The chance to work with people who are genuinely excited about what they are doing and who have invented really neat things. It's part of my job to talk to them and ask them questions. I'm the ultimate dilettante, since I'm exposed to a broad range of technology and get to learn a little about all of it.

Biography

Partner in the Silicon Valley law firm of Fenwick & West, specializing in computer and software-related intellectual property law; registered patent attorney. BS and MS in Computer Science, both from the University of Iowa. Goals: to continue to grow as a lawyer and to help my clients achieve their goals.