

Today's Inventors Don't Fit Old Stereotypes

BY NATALIE KADIEVITCH

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Somewhere in Chicago there is a patent attorney who is kicking himself as he reads this story. During the mid-'90s, as a young inventor in Chicago, my client Lori Greiner was disappointed that her first patent attorney didn't take her ambitions seriously, so she began to look for another attorney who would appreciate her business potential.

Fifteen years later, the two of us have worked together on over 100 patents. Since launching her first product, an earring organizer in 1997, Lori has created over 250 products and holds more than 100 U.S. and international patents. Owner of For Your Ease Only Inc., Lori has built a multi-million dollar empire through the invention and sale of functional and fun items.

She's a regular favorite on the QVC USA channel, and her products are available at Bed, Bath and Beyond and Ulta, as well as through catalog distributors, such as Ross Simons. Her products are focused on "making women's lives easier" and they range from jewelry organizers to cosmetic organizers to kitchen gadgets and more. To see more, check out: <http://www.lorigreiner.com/>

I don't think Lori is partial to me because I'm a woman. I think she appreciates the fact that I took her ambition seriously, respect her and that I'm upfront with her. Lori probably also appreciates my persistence. Years ago, Lori invented a decorative bowl that other attorneys didn't think was patentable. I pursued it, and we got patents on it. When the bowl hit the market, it was so popular it flew off the shelves.

SALES ARE STRONG, DESPITE RECESSION

People are starting to sit up and take notice of Lori's success as an inventor and as a business woman. Although it's tough to prove, because some products are patented by teams of people, I believe that Lori

is among the most prolific individual female inventors in the United States. In fact, on March 11th of this year, she was lauded at the first Women's Entrepreneurship Symposium in Alexandria, Va., co-sponsored by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and the U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce. There were more than 100 attendees at this first event focused on women entrepreneurs, which also was shared as a video conference simulcast nationwide via the Patent Office's website.

People who see her success now often don't realize that she's had to work extremely hard to achieve what she has accomplished. It was exciting to be in the audience and see how far she's come from the day in 1996 when I first met her.

IN MID-'90S, FEMALE PATENT ATTORNEYS AND INVENTORS WERE RARE

When the male attorney she was initially referred to didn't take her seriously, she asked the receptionist if the firm had any female patent attorneys. Fifteen years ago, female patent attorneys were rare, so Lori was relieved to find me. I was an intellectual property attorney with an electrical engineering degree whose focus was obtaining patents. Because of my technical background, I don't often have the opportu-



IP Attorney Natalie Kadievitch of Fredrikson & Byron (left) was on hand when her client Lori Greiner, president of For Your Ease Only, manufacturer of fun and functional household items for women, presented at the first Women's Entrepreneurship Symposium in Alexandria, Va., which was co-sponsored in March of this year by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and the U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce.

nity to work with female inventors. In fact, I believe Lori was the first female inventor I had ever worked with up until that time. When Lori came to my office for our first meeting, I could see the determination to succeed on her face.

Female patent attorneys, especially those with electrical engineering degrees are pretty rare. Sole female inventors are also pretty rare. Today, 10 percent of U.S. inventors are women; 30 years ago, it was only 1.7 percent. But we have a long way to go. The National Inventors Hall of Fame has inducted 200 inventors – only six of whom are women.

However, we are seeing signs of progress, today almost a third of all patent examiners are women. In 1984, only 3 percent of the attorneys who passed the patent agents exam were women, according to the October/November 2008 issue of *Intellectual Asset Management Magazine*. By 2007, this percentage had increased to 17 percent.

Although women are still minorities on both sides of the patent process, one must never underestimate the potential of our influence over markets in the United States and abroad. Today U.S. women own 30 percent of all firms in the United States and control \$4.3 trillion in spending – make that \$20 trillion worldwide, according to *The Women-Led Economy*, a 2010 report sponsored by the U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce in Washington, D.C.

According to an article by futurist Thomas Frey, throughout history female inventors have focused on creating products that make women's lives easier, including the dishwasher by Josephine Cochran in 1886, the windshield wiper by Mary Anderson in 1915, the brassiere by Mary Phelps Jacob in 1913, and disposable diapers by Marion Donovan in 1950.

I suppose it's natural that women are more familiar with what female consumers need and want. However, you don't have to be a woman or a genius to take advantage of this exploding market. Most of us meet hundreds of inventors during our careers who have great ideas but lack the persistence to do what they need to do to bring their products to market.

During the past 15 years, I've learned many important lessons through my work with Lori. One of the most impressive is that the next inventor who asks to meet with me who doesn't fit my stereotypes or experience working with inventors may in fact have the potential to create hundreds of lucrative products and generate more than \$400 million in sales.

In today's world of intellectual property, it pays to be open-minded. **(IPT)**