



WILKA VARELA TOPPINS, J.D.

The Law Office of Wilka Varela Toppins, P.C
Founder & President
The Corporate Latina, LLC
Founder & President

Wilka Varela Toppins is a veteran corporate attorney, a successful entrepreneur and a former senior executive for major Fortune 50 companies, such as Exxon, SBC Communications (now AT&T)

and Macy's, Inc.

Wilka Toppins began her career in 1990 after graduating with honors from Tulane University Law School in New Orleans. Upon graduation, she joined the legal department of Exxon Company, USA, where she concentrated on litigation in both state and federal courts, gaining valuable courtroom experience. After several years in this role, Wilka transitioned to a large law firm in Houston, Porter & Hedges, L.L.P., where she continued to strengthen and build her litigation practice. Subsequently, Wilka was recruited back to an in-house position joining the corporate legal department of SBC Communications, Inc. At SBC, Wilka broadened her legal and management experience assuming legal responsibility over large geographic business units of SBC and its subsidiaries across the United States and abroad.

Wilka, a native of Puerto Rico, is fully bilingual. Wanting to use her language and cultural competency skills within her profession, Wilka decided to leave SBC and work as Corporate Counsel for a Washington DC-based firm of international investors developing wireless companies across Central America. Through this experience, Wilka gained tremendous insight into the creative process of business startups and she further honed in her management, regulatory and international legal skills.

In 2004, after experiencing a personal tragedy with the death of her husband, Wilka decided to establish her own law practice. Wilka's law firm concentrates in litigation, corporate law, commercial transactions, real estate, international law and labor/employment law. Wilka quickly became a well-sought after bilingual corporate lawyer in Houston. Her law firm also gained notoriety as the only corporate boutique firm in Houston fully owned and managed by a Hispanic woman.

In late 2008, Wilka accepted a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Macy's Inc, a client of the firm, asked that Wilka join it as their Vice President - Diversity Strategies. This presented a groundbreaking role for Wilka as the first Latina holding a corporate vice president position at Macy's. In that role, Wilka was responsible for designing and driving a diversity strategy to all parts of the business concerning the Latino segment in the U.S. Her key duties involved developing the external corporate community outreach strategy with the Latino segment, developing strategic partnerships with

Latino national organizations, creating strategic programs with organizations to meet the strategic goals of Macy's and developing sustainable relationships of mutual benefit and helping the retail giant enhance its brand and drive customer loyalty with this segment.

Today, Wilka has transitioned back to Houston and has resumed her leadership role at the law firm. In addition to her law practice in Houston, Wilka is the President and Founder of The Corporate Latina, LLC., a Houston based consulting firm that provides targeted coaching, training and tools to help advance Latinas and other women of color to positions of leadership in Corporate America. In this role, Wilka is a sought after public speaker, trainer and corporate career strategist.

Wilka has been recognized with multiple national and local awards, namely, the 2006 "Top 25 Lawyers in Houston" by H Texas Magazine, the 2006 Ana Maria Arias Memorial Fund as a "Top 10 Latina Entrepreneur" presented by LatinaStyle Magazine and Wells Fargo, the 2006 "Emerging 10 Business" award presented by the Houston Minority Business Council and the 2009 Corporate Excellence Award presented by the League of Latin American Citizens.

Wilka is also nationally recognized and respected as a national Latina leader contributing a strong record of civic and community service at the city, state and national level. Wilka has been a part of the following organizations: Board Member of the Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Board Member of Hispanic Alliance for Career Enhancement (HACE), Board Member of the Galleria Chamber of Commerce, Board Member of Variety Children's Charity of Houston, Board Member of the Houston Hispanic Bar Association, Board Member of the Houston Hispanic Media Professionals, Board Member of the Sociedad de Puertorriqueños en Houston, Inc., Board Member of the National Hispanic Professional Organization (NHPO), Member of the Houston Minority Business Council, Steering Committee Member of the Minority Counsel Program of the State Bar of Texas where she assists with the development of the program for its annual Minority Counsel Conference as well as serving as a CLE-speaker, Alumni of Leadership Houston and Board of Trustees of the Cincinnati Opera.

In addition to her long list of private organizations, Wilka also was a proud member of the Texas Trade Delegation representing the Office of the Governor, in Mexico City as a delegation speaker in the state-sponsored quarterly "Invest In Texas" business seminars held across Mexico.

Wilka was born in Puerto Rico. She moved to the U.S at the age of 18 years to attend college at the University of Massachusetts. At the time, she did not know English. Nonetheless, Wilka graduated with a degree in Political Science with honors Wilka has a son, Edward, who is 21 years old and is a senior at Virginia Tech.