



# Ellie Vilendrer

**E**llie Vilendrer is not your typical attorney. She's a successful two-state solo practitioner, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) neutral, tech company co-founder and chief operating officer, wife, mother, karaoke enthusiast, and all-around Renaissance woman. She's reached milestones most lawyers dream of: speaking for the American Law Institute, being sworn in at the U.S. Supreme Court, and trying (and winning) a major case to jury verdict.

These successes can be traced back to a train ride in Italy. Vilendrer studied abroad in Paris during her sophomore year at the University of Southern California (USC) where she was studying French and business administration with a concentration in corporate finance, all the while running competitively for the track team. After the semester concluded, she took a 12-day solo sojourn to Italy. While on the train, she met a lawyer trained at USC. In their conversation, this stranger, who became a friend, urged her to go to law school. Inspired, Vilendrer took the advice and has never questioned that this was her destiny.

Vilendrer's legal experience is as diverse as her many roles. She

began her career as a civil litigator and trial attorney in southern California working for a small firm, where, as her boss would say, she was baptized by fire. Most young lawyers only dream about sitting first chair on a major lawsuit. Vilendrer recounted, "Within two weeks of being sworn in to the bar of California in 2007, I took six depositions. Seven months later, I solo-chaired a weeklong trial in the same case on behalf of a plaintiff who was suing his ex-wife and ex-mother-in-law for breach of oral contract, fraud, and personal injury." Ms. Vilendrer not only won all counts in the case but she also won an award five times greater than what her boss thought possible and what he had demanded to settle the case just days before trial.

This victory was not without its high drama. Vilendrer recalled, "The greatest feat of all was that the day before our expert medical witness was supposed to testify, we were notified that he had to perform an emergency surgery and wouldn't be able to testify until after his appointed time. Our judge, who had a reputation for being the strictest judge in the county on trial protocols, said the court would not wait until the afternoon to hear testimony from our expert. When court adjourned for the day at 4:30 that evening, I called everyone I knew in search of a replacement expert to testify the next morning. As a result of these efforts, I retained, at the last minute, the best orthopedic surgeon in town. He examined my client in the hallway outside the courtroom at 7:30 that next morning and then testified as to my client's injuries and future medical needs at 9:00 a.m."

At the end of 2010, she moved to Minnesota and continued her litigation practice at Bassford Remele. She worked full-time as she studied for and passed the Minnesota bar exam. She became qualified under Rule 114, Minnesota General Rules of Practice, and started volunteering as a mediator for Community Mediation and Restorative Services. In 2013, Vilendrer left the trial firm to start her own practice.

Her solo practice is not run of the mill; she focuses on corporate law with an emphasis in ADR and negotiations. "I became frustrated by how wasteful litigation is and wanted to help people achieve resolution before going down the rabbit hole of litigation," she said. "The irony and tragedy is that litigation shrinks the pie. The earlier a case is resolved, the more pie there is to distribute. Early resolution of disputes, preferably pre-suit, usually leads to much better outcomes: saving money, salvaging relationships, and preventing enormous stress," said Vilendrer.

As a female working in the ADR field, Vilendrer has overcome adversity. "There was often a strong reaction by very seasoned male attorney mediators that younger attorneys should have

no business mediating disputes. I questioned that. Mediation is such a valuable service that it should be the first choice as a dispute resolution mechanism, and litigation should be the alternative," she said. While she recognizes that mediation is a very difficult field to break into, she says lawyers acting as advocates can take an ADR mind-set to client representation and help their clients negotiate a beneficial resolution.

Ellie Vilendrer continues to develop her professional skills despite her success. In November 2015, she attended the Advanced Negotiation Master Class at Harvard University where she obtained the best outcome in a negotiation among 60 professional negotiators from around the world. She has also taken online courses in game theory, competitive strategy, and advanced competitive strategy through Coursera. With her plethora of knowledge, she was asked to present "Become a Better Negotiator in 60 Minutes" for an American Law Institute CLE.

With her diverse career, Vilendrer learned one of the most important lessons of practicing law: have a mentor. "Having a mentor is crucial. Without the guidance of my very generous mentor, Don Willeke, a corporate law guru, I could not have done it. Too often you don't know what you don't know."

Ms. Vilendrer's professional accomplishments are not limited simply to the law. She and her brother, Iman Khabazian, founded Hitsfu, a company that provides data science as a service for mobile games and apps. Branded Clairvoyance™, their artificial-intelligence-powered prediction engine enables outcome-driven decision-making for app developers. Their launch customer, VIEW, has already seen a sixfold improvement in the total time users spend in their app.

The Carlson School of Business at the University of Minnesota hosts the annual MN Cup, the nation's largest statewide new venture competition. Hitsfu earned a prestigious spot in the top-ten of the high-tech division in this year's MN Cup competition that drew more than 1,500 applicants. The 2016 semifinalist placement also led to the siblings being featured in an article in TECHdotMN in July.

With her dual expertise in law and technology, Vilendrer knows continuing changes in technology will impact the future of the legal

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field. "Some people are now buying boilerplate contracts and incorporating their businesses online through platforms like Rocket Lawyer. While these online platforms do create competition which is beneficial to consumers in the high-priced market of legal services, there will still be plenty of clients that understand the value of vetting attorneys they can trust and who will be held accountable to scrutinize every word and analyze every issue."

Vilendrer predicts technology will not just impact clients, but will also contribute to the ideal work-life balance working professionals strive for. "Working remotely creates tremendous cost and time savings. It is advantageous especially for parents who are already stretched thin."

Vilendrer knows the plight of working parents firsthand. She is the mother to two daughters, ages 1 and 3. She balances her busy career and young family with the help of her supportive husband of five years. She cherishes her family time, whether it is filming a segment for their family YouTube channel, singing karaoke together, or planning activities for her daughters. "I love being the architect of my daughters' futures. I hope to inspire a genuine curiosity in their young minds so that they truly enjoy learning and become lifelong learners." Vilendrer does indeed inspire confidence—that with hard work and dedication, anything is possible.



**Sarah Pherson**

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Ms. Pherson is a 2014 graduate of Hamline University School of Law and is admitted to practice in Minnesota. She clerks for the Hon. Michael K. Browne in Hennepin County District Court. Previously, she was the intake investigator at the Office of Police Conduct Review in Minneapolis.