

HPW INSPIRING WOMEN SERIES:

Maria Doulis, Deputy Comptroller for Budget and Policy Analysis for the Office of New York State Comptroller

Tell us a little bit about yourself and about your upbringing. What impact has your Greek heritage had on your personal life and career?

I grew up in Astoria, at a time when it was still a microcosm of Greece. I grew up living in the same house as my grandparents, and it was only as an adult that I realized what a blessing that was. Like many immigrant or first generation kids, I was always straddling two worlds, never quite feeling like I fit into either. Over time, you find yourself by weaving all the strands together. A strong work ethic, determination, perseverance – I'd say those have all been imbued in me from my family but are common traits among Greek immigrants. My faith is central to everything I do. And my husband and I aspire that our three children also see the language, culture and religion as *theirs*, not just ours.

Describe what led to your passion for careers in the nonprofit and government sectors.

I am motivated by service and action. When I see something wrong, my instinct is to help or to fix. It's easy to look at societal problems and write them off as the responsibility or fault of others. It's much harder to empathize and to do something to change what you think are problems. My career has focused on digging into data and writing about government funding and services for the public. But at the root of that is the belief that if we can have transparency, we can have better public discourse and a more responsive government. The goal is to help people most effectively.

Tell us about your proudest accomplishment and one which you plan to achieve in the future.

Having strategies I've written about and argued for be implemented by government leaders is incredibly rewarding. It was also cool to be asked by the New York Times to provide an opinion piece. For the future I'm more focused on seeing what my children can achieve than what I can do myself!

What advice would you give to professional women today, and women who are seeking a leadership role in government?

Speak up! Many of us were socialized to not make demands; we were taught we have to pay our dues and in time would be recognized. If it ever did, but the world no longer works this way. You have to be your own advocate. First, know your own worth, and be honest with yourself about what your strengths and weaknesses are. Second, realize your weaknesses aren't necessarily an inhibitor to your advancement! They say you should improve your weaknesses, but my strategy has always been to double down on my strengths.

Who has inspired you the most in your life?

I'm inspired by people who persevere through unimaginable circumstances and manage to retain their humor, like my pappou. I'm inspired by people who fight for what they believe, even at great personal expense. I'm inspired by people who can wield a pen and prove it true that it is mightier than the sword. And I'm inspired by people who perform quiet acts of charity, care and grace and never seek any recognition, reward or reciprocation.

How do you maintain a balance between your personal and professional life?

This is a never-ending challenge, and you never feel that you're getting it right in the moment. Working your way up the ladder requires intensity of focus and commitment; people think this is just about hours spent at the office or in front of a computer, but it's also about the mental space that your job takes up when you are with friends or your kids, or driving, or cooking dinner. It's important to protect that mental space and have true 'off' time, and also to be proactive about making plans to get offline for those hours. If you're with friends or reading a novel out of reach of your phone, you can set a firmer mental boundary than if you are still flipping through emails or social media on your phone.