



Lowenstein Sandler's Women's Initiative Network Podcast: Real Talk

Episode 31: Mastering Management and Emotional Intelligence for Women Attorneys

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MARCH 2024

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Megan Monson: Welcome to the Women's Initiative Network: Real Talk. I'm one of your hosts, Megan Monson, partner in Lowenstein Sandler's Employee Benefits & Executive Compensation Practice Group. I'm joined by two of my colleagues today, Nicole and Sarah. I'll turn it over to them to introduce themselves.

Nicole Fulfree: Hi everybody, I'm Nicole Fulfree and I'm a partner in Lowenstein's Bankruptcy & Restructuring Department.

Sarah Cole: Hi, I'm Sarah Cole, senior counsel in Lowenstein's Capital Markets & Securities group.

Megan Monson: On today's episode of Real Talk, we're talking about how to manage like a boss and the importance of developing managerial skills and emotional intelligence as female attorneys. Effective management is a critical skill for attorney at any level. Developing practical leadership skills can help attorneys manage their workload and promote team development as well as encourage problem solving and conflict resolution. However, unlike many other professions, attorneys rarely get training on how to be a manager, and this can be a major issue as juniors and advanced to more senior roles.

It is important to keep in mind that no matter how good you are at your job, nobody operates in a vacuum, this is a team sport. As always on Real Talk, we are asking some well-established attorneys to share their experiences on this topic and how to develop a management style that works for you.

Now, we are all familiar with a high IQ being valued in the workplace. However, another significant part of leadership is emotional intelligence or the ability to understand and manage your emotions as well as recognize and influence the emotions of those around you. The key components of emotional intelligence are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Lawyers with higher emotional intelligence are typically more effective at teamwork, client service, integrity,

adaptability, and managing conflict. High emotional intelligence also has a positive impact on relationships, mental and physical health and overall happiness, all of which are key in striking the right work-life balance.

According to one study released by CareerBuilder, 71% of employers actually value emotional intelligence more than technical skills when evaluating prospective candidates. Sarah and Nicole, what is your reaction to this figure, and do you think this percentage would be higher or lower if this study was limited to law firms?

Sarah Cole:

Sure. So I think initially it did seem a little high, but after thinking about it, I think it makes sense. Emotional intelligence can really be a distinguishing factor for candidates who otherwise may have similar technical skills when applying for the same position and if it was conducted by law firms, I think it might be even higher, particularly for junior attorneys when they're just starting out, when you're expected to learn the technical skills on the job. I'd be curious what the breakdown would be for first year hires versus lateral hires.

Nicole Fulfree:

Yeah, I think that's pretty much in line with what I think too. Sarah, I wasn't too surprised by the number. I thought that 71% was about right. I think emotional intelligence is so important for so many different reasons across professions. I see it as sort of like a global skillset that's applicable across jobs and really all areas of your life. I kind of think of it as likability, really. And I think that most employers approach this question with the same perspective, which is that technical skills are often not in all cases, but often at least somewhat teachable. And emotional intelligence is something that's very difficult to teach, at least when someone's at the age of applying to a job. And so with respect to law firms, that question kind of made me laugh. My gut reaction was lower, but I think the legal profession certainly has room for those that have a high level of technical skill and a lower level of emotional intelligence.

But that being said, I think the room for advancement is more limited for those with a lower level of emotional intelligence. And the law, you need emotional intelligence for so many areas of the job. I mean like inward facing. You need it for team management to know your team's strengths and weaknesses and when's the right moment to give feedback. It's super important for discussions. With opposing counsel, if you approach that the wrong way, you're probably going to get yourself into trouble. And especially with dealing with clients and anticipating what they want to know and when they want to know it, it's just incredibly important.

Megan Monson:

Emotional intelligence has a lot of application, I think, in a law firms and just any professional work setting. And so it does really strike, I think the importance of being emotionally aware and incorporating that into your management style and day-to-day practice. So what is the most effective way that you learn and how have you built your learning strategy into your own management style?

Nicole Fulfree:

So for me, I learn the most from a hands-on situation one that I've been involved in. And I feel like I'm particularly open to learning when I feel like

someone is invested in my career. And so I just have one example of when a senior or person really helped me and I feel like was an effective way of teaching. It was after the litigation had ended and he gave me a phone call on the side and said, "You did a great job on the initial brief. Let's run a red line. If you have time, let's run a red line from your initial draft to where we ended up before the filing, and let's hop on a phone call if you're interested, and we'll talk through how we got from your draft to the final draft and maybe tips for going forward."

And I really appreciated that as a young attorney because it showed me that the person who was giving me that phone call initially thought I did a good job, but had some pointers for me and took the time from his busy day to go through it with me and tell me how I could get better, which I really appreciated. So I try to do that for younger attorneys that I see a high level of potential. I try to give them my time in that way because I think it was really effective for me.

Sarah Cole:

And similarly, yeah, I have to say I agree. I think the best way to learn, particularly in the legal profession is just by doing. I think that goes back to the fact that you learn the technical skills on the job and you really need to make sure that you have this emotional intelligence in order to advance yourself in your career.

So I would say dovetailing that, I learned by asking questions and really understanding the full picture, particularly when I'm working on smaller pieces of a project. I'd say I've built this into my own management style because I emphasize on keeping the lines of communication open. I know I was definitely that person who had a ton of questions, really wasn't as sure about, particularly in the securities law field exactly what necessarily was going on. So I really appreciated the folks who did take that time and who made the time and who also made it in an approachable way that there was an ability for them to take that time, that there was a safe space for me to actually ask these questions. And not just the perfunctory, oh, let me know if there's any questions. It's a genuine outreach by those managing attorneys that definitely made a difference.

I think also it's important, again, part of the hands-on, but making sure you are taking that time to explain the project. How would a junior associate be able to understand where they're fitting in to a project if it's the first time they're doing it? So I hope in my management style that I strive for that approachability and hopefully providing that overview for folks.

Megan Monson:

So something that you both touched on and I think is really strong in terms of having an effective style of management is taking the time and spending that time, whether it's answering questions, asking questions, walking somebody through things, really being invested in whomever's on your team. And I think that can really speak volumes and really can make a difference for somebody, especially as they're learning and growing through their career. Are there other styles of effective management that you've seen? And conversely, have there been things that you've seen in practice that don't work and so you choose not to utilize them in your day-to-day?

Sarah Cole:

So one item that I think that we can touch upon, again, I think it's part of theme, but for those who I think are truly effective at management, staying organized is another huge key part of it. And I think it goes to making the time for others because you have to be on top of your own time management and docket management in order to be able to tell people, okay, here's the timeline that we're working on. Here's when I need it by. And by having yourself organized, that's how you can keep the team organized. Conversely, I would say I don't find a trial by fire mindset to be particularly helpful. I find that it discourages communication as well as it also discourages, I think relationship building instead of trying to talk out the issue or talk to others about it. If you feel like you're having to do it all yourself, you feel like you're on an island, I think that's the opposite of what we want in the team building atmosphere.

Nicole Fulfree:

Yeah. Sarah, this was on my list as well. I mean, one of the things that got me most discouraged as a junior associate was if I got an assignment that was a rush over a weekend when I see that the brief that we're responding to that the research is required for, we received it a month ago and it just showed me that it was poor planning by the senior attorney. And I think that it definitely can happen where fire jolts come up and it's needed last minute for a good reason, but if you're someone who is just a procrastinator and then making people work over the weekend, I think that's really discouraging for some of the junior attorneys that are working underneath that type of a manager.

Some effective styles of management that I've seen were particularly motivating for me as a junior attorney, I think of when the lead partner on a case, you feel like they're in the trenches with you, and I don't mean sitting next to you reviewing documents with you, but I mean on top of your task list, checking in with you, seeing if you need anything to complete your task, feeling like they care about what you're doing, being available for questions.

And same thing, the converse is if you're given an assignment and then someone's non-responsive, it kind of feels like you're not getting help, and that makes it a little nerve wracking as a junior. I think another really important thing is to give credit where credit's due. And the opposite is being a credit stealer. I think nothing is more motivating than when you're on a client call and the lead partner on the case says like, "And thanks to Sarah's great idea, this is what we think we're going to do." It's really encouraging for juniors to get that kind of credit.

And the last thing I think is getting people involved in the big picture. One thing that I struggled with as a more junior attorney was getting discrete projects, which is the nature of the job when you're a first or second year, but you're kind of missing out on the learning opportunity if you're not given the full context.

And so that's something I try to work into my management style now. I probably take a little bit longer than even necessary because I really want to make sure that I give people the full context of what's going on and why this is important and why we're doing it this way instead of that way, so that I feel like it's more of a learning experience.

Megan Monson: So I think in things that both of you have touched on, you've highlighted really the importance of incorporating into your management styles, things that you've found the converse of what didn't work right, and to kind of try to build and evolve on what you've seen others do, what worked and what would've been beneficial for you. And I think that's great and something I think it would be empowering if they had learned that at a more junior level. Another situation I think that tends to be a bit challenging is in particular if you're younger in age or have less experience to those that you're overseeing, how do you manage people in those situations? Have either of you had experience with that?

Sarah Cole: So I've had several experiences, as I'm sure we have had over the years. One in particular sticks out. I think it was one of my first times in the legal field where this had come up. Back in law school as a 3L, I was a teacher's assistant for our legal research and writing class for our evening program. And a majority of the students in the class were older than me, so much decades older than me.

And so I personally struggled with being seen as a knowledgeable authority on the matter, and how could I be taken seriously? I'm younger than some of their kids, was literally a comment that was made to me at one point. At first, I tried to be more strict with my lessons, but I didn't really get the results that I was hoping for. So instead I tried a more personal approach.

I focused on being more approachable as an instructor, being open for questions, and really focusing more on how can I communicate with folks on a personal level as opposed to treating this as a transaction? And really from that experience, I'd say no amount of substantive knowledge can replace social skills.

Megan Monson: And Sarah, I love that you tried one strategy, it didn't work, and so you pivoted and tried something different. And I think you have to really play to your strengths, but also keep in mind of who you're managing, right? And something that works with one person may not work with the other. And so being adaptable as you were I think is a key component for a good manager. So thinking back, if you could turn back time, what do you wish you knew as a junior associate on how to manage others? Because at the onset of this discussion, we mentioned that it's not something that you really receive any formal training on.

So if you think back to your younger self, if there was one piece of advice that would've been helpful, what would that be?

Nicole Fulfree: So I think it's kind of funny in the law, and Megan, you mentioned this early on in today's episode, but you become a manager pretty early in your career, and you really don't get that much training on being a manager. And so you're kind of a manager without knowing it. Anyone who's younger than you, you can be the manager of. And so I really wish that I felt more comfortable in being assertive and actually just realizing I was a leader, because in my head I'm like, I'm a third year. I'm a junior associate. I'm not really managing anyone. So I didn't see it as a managerial role. I just saw it as like, okay, I'll

pass along these tasks to the people beneath me, but I feel like I wasn't truly embracing it.

I feel like I was missing out an opportunity to start to hone those skills and ask people if they had questions or if there was something that I could help with. And I just feel like I was kind of not even realizing that I was a manager. So I think an important piece of advice for younger attorneys is realize that pretty much as soon as you're done with your first year, you can potentially be a manager.

Sarah Cole: I agree with that for sure. So I would say what I would want to tell myself is that in conflict situations, conflict avoidance is not conflict resolution. And in order to effectively manage and grow as a leader, you need to learn how to deal with conflicts. And even if you may consider yourself a people pleaser, it's part of your personal growth and your job to be able to manage others. And that means, unfortunately, sometimes dealing with the conflicts, but it's also about learning how to find solutions that are workable. So you make your team even stronger than before.

Megan Monson: Throughout the course of our discussion, you both have put forth many good suggestions on how to develop an effective management style and the importance of building emotional intelligence. Do you have any final parting words of wisdom and advice to our listeners?

Sarah Cole: Sure. So I would say if you are looking to build your emotional intelligence or even really figure out what is my management style, you cannot say enough about meditating or journaling. Really just anything that gives you an opportunity to self-reflect, and giving yourself even just five minutes out of your day to focus and say, what do I really want? How did I handle this situation, really can be invaluable to how you grow.

Nicole Fulfree: Yeah, I think when you're becoming a manager, I think you really know when you're being true to yourself or when you're not. And if you feel like you're trying to be something you're not, I feel like that's kind of a clue that that's probably not an effective management style for you. And as far as building emotional intelligence, no, I think the most important thing is listening to the feedback you get and really self-reflecting on that feedback, even if you might not think it's true in the first place. And as far as particular situations, if you feel like a situation network is bothering you, or if you feel like someone didn't treat you right, I think it's so important to have trusted friends both at work and outside of work that you can discuss the situation with. I've often had a situation where someone's pointed out what the other person's view could have been, and it helps me to see different perspectives and what people were thinking, and I think bouncing those types of ideas with other people really helps you to develop your emotional intelligence.

Megan Monson: Thank you so much, Nicole and Sarah, for sharing your experience and insight on this topic. Honing in on your emotional intelligence, being aware of it, and developing an effective management style, it is really important, especially as you move to more senior and leadership roles. As Nicole mentioned, even as in legal profession, after your first year, you're considered a leader. And so being mindful and thinking about these things

early on and how to craft a version that's true to you is really going to help move the needle and help you progress to the next level. Thanks for joining us for another episode of Women's Initiative Network: Real Talk. We'll see you next time.

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