



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

Episode 48

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[Megan Monson](#), [Laura Cicirelli](#)

FEBRUARY 2026

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- Rachel Dikovics:** Welcome to the Lowenstein Sandler podcast series, the Women's Initiative Network *Real Talk*. I'm Rachel Dikovics, counsel in Lowenstein's White Collar Defense Practice Group and a member of the Women's Initiative Network at Lowenstein Sandler. Before we begin, please take a moment to subscribe to our podcast series at Lowenstein.com/podcast or find us on iTunes, Spotify, Pandora, or SoundCloud. Now, let's take a listen.
- Lauren Russell:** Welcome to *Coffee Chats with WIN*, a Women's Initiative Network series where we sit down with inspiring women to talk candidly about the choices, challenges, and moments that have shaped their careers.
- Jessica Stewart:** We're your hosts. I'm Jessica Stewart, and that's Lauren Russell. We're associates here at Lowenstein Sandler. In each episode, we'll share practical insights on risk-taking, building strong teams, and navigating the early years of practice, along with a few personal stories that remind us we're all human.
- Lauren Russell:** Pour yourself a cup and settle in as we learn how today's guest got here, what she's learned along the way, and most importantly, how she takes her coffee.
- Jessica Stewart:** Hi, Megan. Thanks for joining us today. I'll turn it over if you can introduce yourself.
- Megan Monson:** Sure. Happy to be here. I'm Megan Monson, a partner in Lowenstein Sandler's Executive Compensation, Employment and Benefits Practice Group.
- Jessica Stewart:** Give us an overview of your career. How'd you end up here today?
- Megan Monson:** So, I started my career in a little bit of a unique way where I worked at Deloitte as an in-house consultant doing employee benefits, primarily retirement plan legal work. And I practiced there for a little over two years. And while I learned a lot and I had some great mentors, I felt that that type of role being so junior in my career was a bit limiting. And so, I was really looking to go to a law firm

where I could get exposed to host of other things within that type of practice area. And, in particular, I was drawn to firms where I could do a bit of merger and acquisition work that dovetailed into my practice area as well.

And so, when I started looking at firms for those type of opportunities, I was really intrigued by Lowenstein in particular, because I could do very sophisticated New York level legal work, work in New Jersey, which to me from a personal standpoint was very attractive. And then when I met with the people, all of which whom I still work with today, it really just felt like home in terms of just the personalities. I think the type of environment that Lowenstein offers, a lot of the autonomy and entrepreneurial spirit that they encourage are all things that I felt through the interview process. And being here 10 years later, I couldn't be more happy with my decision. And it's what drew me in the door and it's what's continued to keep me here.

Lauren Russell: So, what do you think is the biggest risk you've taken in your career?

Megan Monson: So that is a great question. Two different things. The first being my decision to come to Lowenstein, just because as somebody who is averse to change and starting over and starting fresh, I was a little bit nervous about that and wasn't sure what that would bring, especially have not having practiced in big law in law school, I was a little bit nervous. And I'll add that Lowenstein, along with many other firms I had applied to as for summer associate positions and did not get an offer. So just the mentality of being rejected at an earlier stage of my career and then now actually having the opportunity to come in and practice as an associate and work my way up the ranks, I think was certainly a big risk for me.

I'll say the other risk that I took was more so just kind of getting myself out there in terms of trying to build my own network in terms of attracting clients and also building my network inside the firm. For me at a junior level, those two things were very challenging. And so, forcing myself out of my comfort zone to kind of take on those different types of opportunities, which in hindsight really helped accelerate my career path, but it, again, kind of forced me to work outside the box and the things that I was comfortable doing.

Jessica Stewart: When building out your team, what's something you look for in younger attorneys?

Megan Monson: So, I think the biggest thing that I look for is somebody who has a great enthusiastic attitude. A lot of the things that you, at a junior level, you're going to be learning the law, and you're going to be learning things as you're practicing. But somebody who's willing to be a team player, who's willing to

show up, who's enthusiastic in learning and tries really hard, I mean, those are all skills that not everybody has, and you can work with them to learn the substantive knowledge.

Lauren Russell: So, what's a piece of advice that you wish you knew at our stage of your career?

Megan Monson: So, I'd say I wish I knew that it's okay to not know the answer and to ask questions and to have the confidence that that's okay. I think as a more junior associate, I felt like I always needed to find the right answer or present something. And sometimes there's not a good answer or if a client asks a question knowing that it's okay to get back to them and just being able to, kind of, I think have that confidence to do that is something that I certainly struggled with at a more junior level in my career.

I'll also say that I realized the importance of, kind of, to my risk taking answer, building your network, again, internally and externally early on. Not expecting that it's going to turn into any sort of client work necessarily but being comfortable that that's part of your practice and putting yourself in those situations. Because as you get more senior and you have all more of those relationships, it just becomes a lot more organic and a lot easier to maintain it.

And I've heard the advice that building client relationships, you're planting seeds and it takes many, many years. So, to have that be part of your practice and your day-to-day at an early stage in your career can help set you leaps and bounds apart from other people at your same seniority.

Jessica Stewart: On a more personal note, where can we find you on an ideal Saturday afternoon?

Megan Monson: So that's a great question. I will say it depends if it's a Saturday where I have my daughter or not. So, I have a four-year-old at home. And so, my ideal Saturday afternoon with her is usually spent outside or kind of playing around and just kind of having fun and enjoying each other's company. If I am not with her, my ideal Saturday afternoon would either be at a winery with my girlfriends or curled up at home reading a good book.

Lauren Russell: And now, the most important question, how do you take your coffee?

Megan Monson: So that's a great question with the caveat that I have never drank coffee and I'm not a coffee drinker. However, I drink my tea, light and sweet with milk and sugar like the Brits.

Lauren Russell: Great. Thank you so much for joining us today, Megan.

- Megan Monson:** Thanks so much for having me.
- Jessica Stewart:** Before we jump into our next interview with another inspiring woman, we want to hear from you.
- Lauren Russell:** How do you take your coffee? Share your order in the comments on our LinkedIn or Instagram post.
- Hi, Laura. Thanks for joining us today. Can you introduce yourself?
- Laura Cicirelli:** Yeah, thank you for having me. My name is Laura Cicirelli. I am partner here in our Emerging Companies and Venture Capital Group.
- Jessica Stewart:** Give us an overview of your career. How did you end up here?
- Laura Cicirelli:** So, I started my career I graduated Seton Hall Law in 2016. I started at another large international law firm in New York City in 2016 and stayed there until 2018. There I did leveraged finance work initially. Didn't love it, rotated into their banking regulatory group, also didn't love it, and then pivoted over to Lowenstein in March of 2018 and been here ever since and kind of just landed in my group because I had interviewed for a summer position with Ray Thek and I had known Anthony Pergola as well. My father actually knew him from St. Peter's University now and they were on the board of trustees together. So with those connections, I just landed in this group and loved it, so been here ever since.
- Lauren Russell:** So, what do you think is the biggest risk you've taken in your career?
- Laura Cicirelli:** So, the biggest risk by far has been that move from my first job to this job. I am a creature of habit. Any type of new situation scares me. And at the time I made the move in 2018, I had just gotten engaged. We just moved where we were living, and then I was going to do the career. Not the career move, but just the location move. And that was just all daunting, especially all at once.
- So, definitely the biggest risk at the time, I'm the only lawyer in my family. So, I didn't know if I just didn't love where I was working and the work I was doing or I didn't love being a lawyer. So that was also very scary to me. And so just making this move and thinking, "Well, if I don't love it, then I have two jobs that I've left within a two-year window." And that was also very just scary and daunting. So certainly that pivot in 2018 was the biggest one.
- Jessica Stewart:** When building your team and staffing your matters, what's something you look for in younger attorneys?

Laura Cicirelli: So, for younger attorneys, you're not expected to know everything the second you join. It takes quite a bit of time to get that expertise and the confidence with the substance that you're doing, but just someone who is responsive, eager to help, eager to learn, ask questions, and does so with a smile on and always eager to continue learning and helping, that's really what I look for. Someone that if we do have to work late at night together, someone who you just enjoy working with.

Lauren Russell: So, what's something you wish you knew at our stage of your career?

Laura Cicirelli: So, there's a couple of things. The first thing I would say is advocate for yourself. No one's going to do it for you. And even if they do advocate for you, no one is going to do it as well as you can do it for yourself. So, making sure that if there's certain work you want to be getting more of, reaching out and getting that work. Don't just think because you tell a few people that you want to do it, that they're going to keep that in mind every time they hear of a new deal come in and push it to you. They may, but no one's going to do it better than you reaching out every day and making sure you fill your plate up with what you want to do.

Especially here, we have kind of like a free market system. I didn't have that at my first firm. So, it's something that's certainly unique to this firm and to take advantage of it and make sure you advocate for yourself. Not only with the type of work you want to do but just balancing also your personal life too with work. This is a very demanding job. And so, if you have something going on in your personal life people may not be aware of, making sure you advocate and let people know that this stuff is going on. If you have your wedding coming up, like when I came here, I was getting married and then I had my first baby and it's just you need to let people know what's going on and they're super supportive of it. So definitely advocate.

Jessica Stewart: On a more personal level, where can we find you on an ideal Saturday afternoon?

Laura Cicirelli: This is going to sound so uninteresting, but honestly, my ideal Saturday is just waking up a little later, which for me means like 6:30 in the morning, closer to 7:00. I have two boys, so my first is four and a half, Lincoln. My second is going to be nine months tomorrow, Dominic. So ideally, just waking up slowly with them, enjoying the morning with the hustle and bustle of work, it's rare to do during the week. So lots of Bluey, lots of snacks. I'm a snack mom, all for it and just hanging out with them. It's what makes me happy.

Lauren Russell: And now, our most important question, how do you take your coffee?

- Laura Cicirelli:** So, when I first got this question, when I saw tea is acceptable, it is not. I am a big coffee drinker. Any season, it's got to be iced. That's my number one criteria. There has to be some type of flavor in it, so sugar-free of some sort because I don't like to drink my calories, and then the splash of oat milk or skim.
- Lauren Russell:** All right. Well, thank you so much for joining us, Laura.
- Laura Cicirelli:** Yeah. Thank you, guys.
- Lauren Russell:** Thank you for joining us for this episode of *Coffee Chats with WIN*. We hope that today's conversation offered you a perspective you can use, whether you're charting your next move, mentoring the next generation, or simply looking for a dose of motivation with your morning brew.
- Jessica Stewart:** If you enjoyed the episode, please follow the series and share it with a colleague. Until next time, keep investing in your growth in your community and don't forget to tell us: How do you take your coffee?
- Rachel Dikovics:** Thank you for listening to today's episode. Please subscribe to our podcast series at Lowenstein.com/podcast or find us on iTunes, Spotify, Pandora, or SoundCloud. Lowenstein Sandler Podcast series are presented by Lowenstein Sandler and cannot be copied or rebroadcast without consent. The information provided is intended for a general audience. It is not legal advice or substitute for the advice of counsel. Prior results do not guarantee a similar outcome. The content reflects the personal views and opinions of the participants. No attorney-client relationship is being created by this podcast and all rights are reserved.