



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

Episode 5 - But I Get Up Again: Personal and Professional Resiliency – Part 2

By [Megan Monson](#), [Rachel Moseson Dikovics](#), [Amanda Cipriano](#)
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Amanda Cipriano: Welcome to the Lowenstein Sandler Podcast Series: The Women's Initiative Network, Real Talk. I'm Amanda Cipriano, an Associate attorney and 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/podcasts](https://www.lowenstein.com/podcasts), or find us on iTunes, Spotify, Pandora, Google Podcasts, and SoundCloud. Now let's take a listen.

Rachel Dikovics: Welcome back to the Women's Initiative Network: Real Talk. This is part two of our discussion about personal and professional resiliency. I'm Rachel Dikovics, one of your co-hosts. I'm an Associate at Lowenstein Sandler, in the White Collar Criminal Defense Practice Group.

Megan Monson: And I'm Megan Monson, another one of your co-hosts, Partner in Lowenstein Sandler's Employee Benefits and Executive Compensation Practice Group. And we're joined by a great guest speaker today.

Amanda Cipriano: And I'm Amanda Cipriano, an Associate in Lowenstein Sandler's Litigation Group.

Megan Monson: On our last episode, we focused on one of our favorite topics, personal and professional resiliency. We're going to continue that discussion today. As background for our listeners, especially if you weren't able to join us in part one, in 2019, which now given the state of the world, seems like a really long time ago, we hosted a program at Lowenstein for our Women's Initiative, focusing on resiliency and overcoming obstacles.

Studies have shown that lawyers and other professionals exhibit significantly higher levels of stress than essentially any other category of workers; so it's really for us to be able to not only bounce back from moments of stress, but also figure out how to effectively cope with stress in a manageable way.

We started off our program by polling attendees, to understand what are some top habits that are exhibited by resilient individuals, both personally and professionally. We also asked, "What is the top unhealthy habit that inhibits and tends to hold us back?" Lastly, we asked about, "What is a top habit that prevents us from recognizing that our mistakes and missteps can help inform our future successes?" We used the feedback from this session to guide us through a thoughtful discussion.

Rachel Dikovics: After the program, we created a list of 10 habits that build resiliency. We've since shared them with many others, and in our previous episode, we shared those first five habits: avoid comparing yourself to others, ditch overuse of qualifiers, rely on each other, think positively and keep perspective, and own your successes and your mistakes.

Today, we're sharing the remaining five habits. Those habits include: don't lose the forest through the trees, responding to a misstep is as important as making it, project confidence, not apology, strive for positivity in your environment, and finally, make guilt-free time for yourself.

Amanda Cipriano: Well, moving on to the next tip, I might need a little more explanation on this one. What does it mean to, "Don't lose the forest through the trees?" What are your thoughts on that?

Rachel Dikovics: So this, I think, goes back to looking at the whole spectrum of your challenges and successes. It's not productive to become totally fixated on a mistake when you make one. Overthinking a mistake really can lead you to distort its importance in the grand scheme of things. It's really helpful to consider the mistake just long enough to decide what you're going to do differently the next time, what you're going to learn from it, and then just try to move on.

It's easy to get inside your own head and blow things out of proportion. Like Amanda said, that's a great time to go to your mentors, and tell them what happened, and see what they think about it. But even if you're just thinking about something on your own, the best thing you can do is think, "Okay, I won't make that mistake again. I'll remember to do X, and I won't have to feel this way again about this particular mistake."

Amanda Cipriano: So I find that being successful at work is kind of like running a marathon; it's not a sprint. Every day isn't easy. And with that said, it can be easy to get bogged down in the day-to-day details of things you're working on; or even a single misstep can make you lose focus, and make you backtrack a little bit. So how have you owned a mistake, and how have you moved forward, even in busier times where you can't really afford to dwell on that mistake?

Megan Monson: So I think one of the points that Rachel mentioned before is key, and that's really the taking ownership of it and bringing it to somebody's attention as soon as you realize it. One thing that I could think of is, I was working on a deal, and I had sent something to opposing counsel, and upon further review of it, I felt that I may have done something wrong or missed something. And immediately, I raised it to the partner who I was working with, and talked it through with him to see if that was the case, and if so, how we can make sure we get it corrected before it becomes an issue.

And so, I think it's just making sure to one, raise your hand as soon as you notice that something may be wrong, or that you aren't sure about something; because it could all be fine. But if it's not, you want to give people the time to react and respond and get things under control before it becomes an issue.

And also, if when you go to that conversation, come up with what you think your proposed solutions are, or why the explanations to the extent they're applicable, so you're kind of in the problem-solving mode. Because sometimes it could be as simple as sending a new document to opposing counsel, like, "Oh, we attached the wrong one," or "Here's an updated version." And that's really a non-issue. I think that happens all the time in a legal profession.

But if it's something that could have more significant consequences, just thinking through how you can navigate it, and what the next steps need to be, if it needs to be escalated further; and then using it as a learning experience. I think if I've sent out the wrong version of a document, I've learned double-check or triple-check the files attached to my email before sending it. Right? That seems like it's a very minor issue, but if you don't catch it right away, it could be something that gets signed up, and it's not the final version.

And things like that happen, I'd say across the board pretty routinely, just because everyone's moving so fast, and trying to get things done so quickly. But taking the extra time to double-check yourself really goes a long way. So I think it's just anytime you've done something wrong, using it as an opportunity to learn from, and building into your routine steps to avoid having that happen again in the future.

Amanda Cipriano: And so, we just talked about responding to those missteps; but why is that response just as important as making that mistake?

Megan Monson: So that's a great question. I think part of it is the fact that nobody's perfect. At some point or another, you're going to encounter obstacles or missteps; and you have to figure out not only the best way to take on those challenges, but bounce back. And to the point I was making earlier, you really want to learn from that mistake, and not make the same mistake twice.

Most people are going to be forgiving that obviously mistakes happen; but if you're routinely having the same issue, you're not using it as a learning opportunity. You're not showing any growth. You're not showing really any concern or diligence in what you're doing. And so, being able to utilize that as an opportunity for growth, and to improve yourself is key. I think also, being able to show that you've encountered challenges, and that you can grow from them are just ways to show that you're growing not only as a professional, but personally as well.

Amanda Cipriano: Now this next habit, I feel that I struggle with the most, and may be very difficult: projecting confidence and not apology. Now, for myself, I know I apologize to inanimate objects if no one's around and I bump into them. I think it's very hard to get away from apologizing and utilizing confidence in your everyday life. So how do we build this habit?

Rachel Dikovics: This is my other favorite habit, because it's another one that I struggle with. And I think a lot of people do. Over-qualifying things is similar to over-apologizing for things. So we want to actively avoid minimizing our own presence and our own contributions. So it's important to carefully consider

your written and oral communications like we talked about earlier, to eliminate words that discredit the validity of what you're asking for.

So I'm a major offender of using the word "just;" I use it constantly to try to soften what I'm saying, and be less annoying; even though I'm just following up, just, on something that I've legitimately asked for, and that likely a response is due or overdue to me. And by following up, I'm doing my job. It is difficult to not use those words. And I think similarly to what we talked about with qualifiers, there are some situations and some communications where maybe you do want to consciously use those words; but the choice should be conscious. They shouldn't be used as your standard operating procedure. And it's important not to apologize for diligently following up when somebody owes you something.

Amanda Cipriano: Do you have any tips or things you say to yourself or before crafting an email, or before getting on a call with a client, to project confidence in your tone of voice, in what you have to say, and just portraying your overall message?

Rachel Dikovics: I can talk about the email portion a little bit. I think that I don't do that beforehand, but I do it before I click send. I re-read the email, and see if I've used any words that I don't need to use, and I try to remove them if it's appropriate to do so in that context.

So one other thing that's good to utilize, again, similarly to the qualifier tip, is to have some go-to phrases that can replace apology phrases. For example, if you know you're joining a meeting late, you may not need to apologize because you're late, especially if you were late from another call or something like that, where it's just something that was out of your control and it wasn't your own disorganization that made you late. Sometimes it's going to be appropriate to apologize, but sometimes it might be appropriate to say, "Thanks so much for your patience. Let's get started."

Similarly, if somebody has pointed out a mistake to you, sometimes you should apologize. Sometimes it might be appropriate to say, "Thanks for catching that. I'll make that edit." Things like that. You can often switch out these apologetic phrases that are unnecessary, and take away from the contributions that you're making.

Amanda Cipriano: I know we talked earlier about thinking positively; but for your ninth tip, how do we strive for a positive environment? What does that mean for us and for those around us?

Megan Monson: So this is something that I personally try to utilize every day in practicing. And it's something that I've noticed is very well-received and noticed on teams I work on. And it's really just having a positive attitude, being positive and encouraging both to others on your team, even if they are not. So, people are working long hours. People may not always be approaching things in the most diplomatic or personable way. But don't let that impact on how you are going to approach and deal with people; because not only does it make you stand out, but it also becomes contagious.

And so, if you're calm and approaching things in a positive light, it's going to put you in a much better position to excel in that group. It's going to set you apart from others. And the rest of your team, frankly, is going to enjoy working with you, because you're somebody who looks at things from a more positive mindset.

Amanda Cipriano: How has being positive in each of your work environments impacted the people around you? Have you seen an example of when you were in a stressful situation, and someone had one active light that turned around the mood? How does that play out?

Rachel Dikovics: I think there are a lot of situations where this comes into play. One thing for me that stands out, is dealing with opposing counsel or external people. I think that a lot of times, people can be unnecessarily formal and over-aggressive in dealing with opposing counsel or other external parties, especially in litigation, as litigators tend to be overly aggressive anyway. But I try to make a real effort to be friendly to people, and to understand that everybody's just doing their job. There is really no reason, from my perspective, most of the time, to have animosity between opposing counsel.

And likewise, a lot of my practice has to do with investigations, and so in that space, I often have to communicate with non-attorneys or attorneys for a company or a governmental entity. And even if you are investigating the company or entity that that person represents, there's no reason to make it unpleasant for that person as an individual. And I've often heard from people that us making something more pleasant or me being pleasant in my communications with them, has made the process of something a lot easier and less stressful for everybody involved. So I think the more you can minimize stress for others, the better feedback you'll get.

Megan Monson: And I think what I've found also is, especially on the corporate side, there's going to be a lot of things that come up and that need to be done immediately. And the people that I find that I'm more willing to and are able to help, are people who, when I've interacted with them in the past, have been positive; it's been a nice, cordial experience. And so, when those emergencies come up, I have no problem putting them to the top of the list, and prioritizing their work. And so, I think it just also helps your general sense of comradery, and developing better working relationships, both internally and externally, when those situations arise.

Rachel Dikovics: Also, people are more likely to say yes to you and your request. This is again, especially relevant for litigators, where people need extensions and maybe multiple extensions or need re-schedulings. If you are friendly enough with your opposing counsel, they're so much more likely to say yes, without giving you a hard time, then if you've been a jerk to them the entire litigation.

Amanda Cipriano: Crossing over to some of our previous topics; do you think there's ever a time where being too positive or being too accommodating could hurt you, especially kind of what we were talking about before, with using qualifiers and things of that nature? Could being too positive hurt you, or you make you seem less respected, or less authoritative in your position?

Megan Monson: I think it really depends on the context and who you're interacting with. And also, the tone of your voice could be another thing is that, so even if you're exuding confidence and being positive, but if you're coming across as confident, I don't think that's going to result in you being discredited, or people not taking you seriously.

But it's all kind of also reading your audience. And even if you are someone who's generally positive and receptive of things from opposing counsel, you also have to look out for your clients' best interest. And there will be times that you can't agree to certain things because it's not feasible, or it's not in the best interest of your client. But it's just being able to deal with those situations when it gets a little bit more tense, diplomatically, and in a professional way. It just makes the process much smoother for everybody involved.

Rachel Dikovics: Yeah. I think it's important to be able to read the room, and not be overly positive if something bad has happened on one of your matters, and people are upset about it. It's good to make sure you're in tune with how everybody else is feeling about a particular issue.

In terms of being overly accommodating, I think that is something that attorneys really struggle with. It's very difficult, especially when you're more junior to say no, when you're offered additional work, or sometimes offered is not the appropriate word. When you're being asked to do additional work, maybe you're already at capacity. It can be very difficult to say no. And I think setting boundaries is extremely important. And I will talk a little bit more about that when we get to the next tip.

Amanda Cipriano: So our next tip is making guilt-free time for ourselves. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Rachel Dikovics: Yes. So I'll continue where our left off, which is setting boundaries at work is extremely important. Your time is really valuable, and especially in a job that's as demanding time-wise as being an attorney is, it's important that you decide how to spend your not-working time with authority and intention, and that you don't let other people encroach on that time outside of emergencies. And we're talking true emergencies, not manufactured emergencies, which we also often deal with.

Once you've decided to step away, to take time for yourself, don't rethink or overanalyze your decision to do it. Enjoy it in the moment; try to stay in the moment. Don't spend your time thinking about you should have stayed home instead, or you should have billed more instead. Try to enjoy what you've decided to do. Recharging and spending time focusing on your interests helps you to be a more effective attorney, and helps to keep you from burning out, which can also be a real problem for attorneys, and for people in lots of other high time commitment fields.

So, something that I often do when I want to do something that's potentially at the beginning or end of a work day, or I want to go out for lunch or something like that, I will put it in my calendar, so that I show up as in a meeting. Even if I just want to take my dog for a walk in the middle of the

afternoon, and I know I'm going to be more than 10 minutes, I'll put it on my calendar. And that way, if I miss a call, or a miss a message from somebody, they know I was doing something else. And that really helps me to be able to go do whatever I want to do, and stay in the moment and not worry about it.

In terms of vacation and things like that, I have told Amanda many times that it's good to let people know in advance when you're not going to be available, so that they can plan around it. And then, if they do try to get to you anyway, at least you can say, "I did let you know that I'm not going to be available." So planning is good. And I have been told by more senior attorneys, some very senior attorneys, that your vacation times should be sacred to you; because nobody else will care whether you take vacation or not. And it's really important to maintaining your mental health, and not burning out, to block out times for yourself to not be working, and to actually not work during those times.

Amanda Cipriano: How do you avoid the guilt of not working, especially in this kind of career where you are comparing yourselves to either the same people in your class here, or people above you who you know are a lot busier? How do you avoid feeling guilty for doing something you enjoy, especially when you know other people around you may be working just as much or even more than you?

Megan Monson: This is something I definitely struggled with early on. And while I still struggle with it now, I've definitely gotten more perspective on things. And I think part of it is realizing that you can't give it 110% all the time, and you do need that time to recharge. Because if you don't, you're just not going to be the most effective at your job. And so, I think that's definitely part of it; and realizing that for you to be the best at your job is going to require you to take time for yourself. And it really is important to do so, so that you now wake up in the next morning, you're recharged and you're excited to go to work, and you're not dreading it because you're so burnt out all the time, and you haven't done anything or spent time on any of your interests.

And in terms of going on vacation, I think what helps is making sure that you've not only as Rachel said, let people know in advance, but pass things off to other people, to the extent that you're able to, so that you have a sense and know that your ongoing matters are covered. And so, you're not... Certainly, things are going to pop up, and that can be it diverted to other people. But by knowing that you've done and put all of your current matters in the best position to be handled by others while you're out, makes it just a little bit easier to not be as focused on being guilty that things aren't getting done.

Amanda Cipriano: Well, thank you both so much for going over these tips with me. I know that it's hard breaking into a career where you already have doubts about yourself, suffer from imposter syndrome, all of those things that we talk about so often, even in a remote world. So this has been super insightful and helpful, and I hope to be able to put some of these tips to the test. And I hope that our listeners are able to incorporate these habits into their lives, too.

Rachel Dikovics: Thanks for joining us, Amanda.

- Megan Monson:** Yeah, I appreciate it. And thanks so much for our listeners today, joining us on this episode of Women's Initiative Network: Real Talk. As Amanda mentioned, we hope you found this discussion useful, and provided you with some tips to incorporate into your personal and professional lives. The tips that we focused on are ones that we've received feedback on, based upon our women, of things that really can make a difference in trying to be a resilient individual, both personally and professionally. Please join us for future episodes of the Women's Initiative Network: Real Talk.
- Rachel Dikovics:** Thanks again. We'll see you next time.
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