



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

Episode 27: Building a Brand: More than Random Acts of Lunch

[Megan Monson](#), [Lynda A. Bennett](#), [Diane Moss](#)

OCTOBER 2023

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.

Megan Monson: Welcome to the latest episode of the Women's Initiative Network: Real Talk. I'm one of your hosts, Megan Monson, Partner in Lowenstein Sandler's Employee Benefits and Executive Compensation Practice Group. I'm joined by two of my very esteemed colleagues today that I'll turn it over to introduce themselves.

Diane Moss: Hi, I'm Diane Moss, Counsel in Lowenstein's Tech Group. I'm excited to have this conversation today. Thanks, Megan.

Lynda Bennett: And thanks for having me, Megan and Diane. Good to talk to you today. This is Lynda Bennett. I'm the Chair of the Insurance Recovery Practice here at Lowenstein Sandler and also an active member in our Women's Initiative and happy to have a conversation around one of my favorite topics.

Megan Monson: Thank you both so much for joining us today. As attorneys, we pride ourselves on our legal skills and serving our clients efficiently and effectively. However, it's also important to spend time developing a robust reputation to really stand out amongst competitors, attract potential clients, and foster relationships with existing clients. This requires spending time and effort cultivating our individual brands. In addition, time is money in our business, and that is the service we sell. As a result, it is critical to be diligent about how to best optimize and focus on career concentrated activities beyond just the day-to-day client service and churning legal work. So as always on Real Talk, we're asking some of our well-established attorneys to share their experiences on how they've navigated this and the benefits of spending time building one's brand. So as I mentioned, we spend so much of our time on billable work or trying to balance other aspects of our lives. So how have you two decided where to spend career-focused internal or external non-billable time?

Diane Moss:

Well, I choose to be involved with organizations, boards, groups that are enriching and aligned with my interests, values and purpose. I've consistently gravitated towards opportunities to mentor, sponsor, and help develop opportunities for others, and it's just really important for me to enjoy spending time with these people and collaborate around a group of people where I feel that there's synergy. I attended a graduation last year and one of the speakers told the graduates, "Go where you are wanted and needed." And I just think that that's great advice in any context. So I've gravitated towards that and aligned my quote unquote "non-billable" time with those personal guidelines for successful collaborations.

Lynda Bennett:

So I started out doing this all the wrong way, Megan and Diane, because when I went to law school, the reason I did that was to run away from business because I didn't want to be a business person. Little did I know that joining our profession was just as much business as it was a profession. And so when I first started allocating between my billable time and my non-billable time, I did all of my non-billable time very intentionally caring about networking and rainmaking, and it was very much driven toward my practice area-focused endeavors.

So I got very involved in Insurance Bar Association type things and hanging around with a bunch of insurance lawyers, which early on in my career served me very well because it helped me learn my craft a lot faster and a lot more practically talking to other lawyers that did the kind of law that I did, but it was too strict and that was one of the things that I learned as I went along. Career development is more than just learning how to be the kind of lawyer you grow up to be. It's also learning how to manage home and work. It's learning how to manage your mental health. It's learning how to be a leader in contexts and in ways outside of your firm. So for me, it's been a long journey that started out very much wrong. Then I've sort of grew into spending that non-billable time more intentionally and more broadly with who I was hanging around with.

Megan Monson:

And I think I really like that both of you have highlighted both the intentionality and finding, say, non-billable activities that align with your interests and what your goals are. And I think if that's how you frame and approach this aspect of building your brand and your career, it's going to come much easier and it's going to be something that you enjoy and not feel like extra quote unquote "work".

Lynda Bennett:

Yeah, Megan. So one of these life coaches that I talked to early on in my career that actually Lowenstein invested in us and brought in an external consultant, and something that he said that I always remembered really resonated with me was you're not going to really start to effectively build your brand or your network when all you do is engage in random acts of lunch. And I knew exactly what he meant when he said that because at that point, I was still just really going out to lunch with people that I thought I should be as opposed to people I genuinely liked. That was a tip that I learned a little too late in life that maybe some of our listeners will learn sooner, which is don't perform random acts of lunch. Have a reason that you're going out with that person and ideally have it start with you actually genuinely like them.

Diane Moss: And I think those common goals, seeking out people who you have something in common with is really important. But I also think it's very common to do what you did, and I think I did it earlier in my career too, you're worried about some of those kinds of metrics that you think are so, so important to develop yourself, and in the meantime, you're kind of spinning your wheels. And so there goes some time which is really precious, and you really haven't been fulfilled by that effort. So yeah, something to keep in mind.

Megan Monson: So I know both of you have been involved with various boards of directors and other external organizations. How has your involvement there helped build your professional brand, and what have you found is the benefit for being involved in these other organizations?

Lynda Bennett: So at the earliest point in my career, as I said, I started out really just hanging around with other insurance geeks, but I gained a lot out of that just learning how organizations work. So I got very involved in the Insurance Law Section of the New Jersey State Bar, and you show up at three meetings and suddenly on the path to being the chair of that group in a two-year time period. So I started to get positions in the New Jersey State Bar where I just learned how to be part of an organization. I learned how board meetings work, I learned how to put agendas together, as silly as it sounds. Again, going back to my roots of I went to college law school and then out into the world. I really didn't know how all that stuff worked. And so it was a tremendous learning and growth experience just to learn how organizations run and holding positions and having responsibilities in that way.

And then also I started to be put in charge of programming for that, which was a really big game changer on the networking side of my brain because when you're doing programming, you need to know people who want to serve on those programs. You need to give thought on how do you find those cutting edge issues that people are going to be interested in knowing about it, which then made me pay attention more beyond just the work on my desk. But I think that the real game-changing organization that I got involved with is the New Jersey Women Lawyers Association when I really got in on the ground floor of that affinity group. And that's where I really say I learned how to become a leader, getting involved in that organization and ultimately being fortunate enough to ascend to be the president of that organization, where I was fielding press inquiries, where I was managing other people. The growth that I experienced through that organization really was amazing.

Diane Moss: To me, Megan and Lynda, this could almost be a chicken or the egg type of question. I definitely think a solid professional reputation laid the path for many of my opportunities to participate on boards, either as a member, counsel, secretary to that board. Doing good work, I think is first and foremost. That's a base for tangential professional roles. Volunteering, getting your name out there, being a part of something within your organization I think is very important. And so my first opportunities came when I was at Time Warner. I was counsel there and I earned a seat on the board of what was the Jonathan Levin Fund, and it was a scholarship fund in honor of the then CEO Jerry Levin's son who lost his life. He was a teacher in the New York City schools. And so a scholarship fund was created.

And I was initially secretary, and I was taking notes and I was doing what Lynda is speaking of. I was learning kind of the process. But I became so involved with seeing and listening to these students and their journey and what they were aspiring to, I would speak up a lot during those meetings and I eventually was offered a board seat. And then I was also kind of our legal lead for our community relations department, and I earned a seat being counsel and secretary to the Quincy Jones Listen Up Foundation, which was Quincy Jones' initiative to help inner city kids get off the streets and get them involved with music, education, technology, and different things like that.

And again, there was structure there. I'm taking notes, I'm listening to all these other people around the table and I'm learning and I'm absorbing all of that. And currently I'm on another board for young women of color. It's also a mentorship sponsorship. But again, these are experiences that have provoked curiosity and a deep dive often into new areas of law for myself, given me the opportunity to have some unique interactions with special people and shape some of the insights and perspectives that I then can share with clients and colleagues and of course have helped me expand my own professional network.

Lynda Bennett:

And Megan, just building a little bit off of what Diane talked about, I mean, when you get involved in these organizations, I'm always fascinated to see different leadership styles. I mean, again, when I was coming up through the ranks, I wasn't a leader yet, and I saw a lot of different approaches on how to lead an organization. I would say that I learned the importance of consensus building. Again, particularly with the New Jersey Women Lawyers Association, we had a lot of very passionate and opinionated women, and we had difficult issues that sometimes we would have to work through, whether the organization was going to speak publicly on a topic, when we chose to speak publicly how were we going to tune that message right? And understanding the rate and gravity of knowing once you're within that top leadership circle, you're speaking on behalf of literally over a thousand members and taking that very seriously and understanding how to tune that message right was something that was really great and certainly a skill I didn't learn in law school and one that in my law practice not as much.

I mean, clients come to us for answers, or I should say I thought that. And what I learned from my consensus building and leading this organization is there were a lot of transferable skills to also creating reasonable expectations within my clients. They became transferable skills to settling my cases because a lot of that's around consensus building and getting people to get where you want them to be. So there was a lot of growth and development that seemingly was external that also became very usable inside my organization and for the work that I do on behalf of clients.

Diane Moss:

And I'll just add onto that. It makes me think of the kind of, as you mentioned, Lynda, the problem-solving styles and also how people can inspire people to join them in a course of action. And I think when you have the opportunity to be in a group and you see these styles, it can help but inform kind of how you want to impact people and your clients. In my practice, a slightly different role in the sense that many of my clients are early starting companies, and so I almost have to fill a pseudo-GC role because they need help in various aspects. And so those skills come into play in your legal work as well.

Megan Monson: So in addition to I think a lot of the leadership skills, time management skills and really understanding all the inner workings of organizations that both of you have gained from your participation in these various external organizations, one thing that you both touched on is really the benefit of networking and getting to know other people and sharing perspectives and opinions on different matters. So if you can share a little bit about how you found your role in these various external organizations to help you in terms of networking. And is there a particular instance that stands out in your mind of an impactful relationship, or an impactful moment based on the folks that you've met through these organizations?

Lynda Bennett: Well, for me, I mentioned the New Jersey Women Lawyers Association was a hugely impactful organization that I was very, very actively involved in for over 10 years. I'm still involved, but not as actively. Got to move aside to let the young ones keep coming up through. But there were a few things that really stood out to me in my involvement with that from the networking perspective. One, a number of my adversaries were involved in that organization and coalescing around topics and issues that were important to us as women in the legal profession, when I had to come up against them in a case, there was a much greater connection and an easier interaction on the professional side, the works side of what I had to do.

But one moment that absolutely stands out to me is going to the Gala every year for the New Jersey Women Lawyers. That is literally a who's who event of the New Jersey Bar and over 700 people go to that event. And I get through the night, and I haven't seen everybody that I know there. And that's an amazingly empowering feeling to have been involved in an organization and so deeply involved in an organization that you can go to one of these quote unquote "big room" events and you're a player there. You're a known quantity and you feel a real deep and genuine connection with these women, many of whom are lifelong friends of mine.

In fact, I was the president of that organization when my father was sick and ultimately passed away. And members of my family at the wake and at the funeral got almost tired of me saying, they're like, "Now who's this person?" I'm like, "Oh, she's from the New Jersey Women Lawyers Association. Oh, she's from the New Jersey Women Lawyers Association." So these people really become much more than professional contacts and potential business referrers. They really can become near and dear family members to you, which I've been very fortunate to have that experience over the course of my career through the New Jersey Women Lawyers, also through WIN, as we've seen right here at Lowenstein Sandler. When you put yourself out there beyond the billable work that you have on your desk to do, amazing and very deep connections can form when you allow yourself that extra time in your day and in your career.

Diane Moss: I like people and I enjoy the opportunity to connect with others, hear their story, share mine. I think that these exchanges are interesting, and they've always been learning opportunities for me. I do believe leveraging the knowledge, guidance and experience of others is really important throughout your career. So, your network can establish a wealth of resources for you both professionally and personally. Lynda spoke to WIN, our Women's Initiative Network, I'm an active member of WIN. I'm a part of our firm's

diversity leadership network and I'm also a member of our social, Pro Bono Social Impact Committee. These are really just ways to connect over things that you care about. Having conversations with people in these spaces establishes a connection through the experience. For me, it's not just about myself but because I'm involved in mentorship, as a mentor who invests in the pipeline, being a connector is very important. There's a quote that I love, and I think it is meaningful in a professional context: "If you want to go fast, go alone and if you want to go far, go together."

Now, in terms of your second question, Megan, I can't really think of a specific instance or anything in particular but for me, I really feel like it's the sum of the whole, and having people who know me from various professional spaces and roles endorse my ability to do good work and be effective really been a big plus for me and opened doors to new opportunities and professional experiences. I've had a varied professional journey. And, I've been in-house counsel, I've been counsel outside and done secondments, built roles as a GC. So, coming to this whole place of where I am now, I really think that connecting with people in these different spaces, and taking all of those external experiences has been value added for me.

Lynda Bennett:

And just a couple of other points on networking. I mean, I want to state the obvious since we are all lawyers and this group here is in private practice, networking obviously helps you generate business. And certainly, being out there and having people know what you do and where you work in context outside of your firm certainly helps to get the phone ringing. But one of the things, again, on my long networking journey that I learned is early on I felt like there needed to be a one-to-one correlation. When I went to lunch, I better have left with business, otherwise it was a waste of my time. And what I've learned as I've evolved over time is spending that time networking, I do a lot of public speaking, sometimes someone will have heard a speech that I've given three years ago, but they remember. When they have the insurance problem, my phone rings.

So of course, there's an element to this of wanting to develop your business, but what I've learned is you don't have to directly ask either. The more that you put yourself out there, the more that people know what you do, the more, and Diane touched on it before, the more genuine you are in why you're with that person, getting to know that person, they're going to want to help you, just like you're going to want to help them. So there's a lot of benefit that comes out of networking from the business perspective.

But I would also be remiss if I didn't talk about other types of involvement in other organizations that have nothing to do with the law. So I'm very active in the Leukemia Lymphoma Society. I'm on the board of my son's former high school. They've both graduated, thankfully. But being involved in those nonprofit organizations, one, there's a do-good factor, so you feel good that you're spending your time in giving back to your community. But I, again, overlooked the importance of that early on in my career when I was on the hamster wheel of thinking that the goal is I got to churn out as many billable hours as I can. When I actually stopped and got involved in these two other organizations that I'm very passionate about, that I care a lot about, a very interesting thing happened.

I was happier in my life because I was not working, working, working, working, working. And so actually when I came back to my desk after having done some good through those organizations, I'm in a better mental head space just even doing my work. So there is a lot of value to having well-roundedness in your networking that you do. And there are many reasons to do networking beyond a one-to-one correlation of who's going to send me work. Some networking leads you to meet people you never otherwise would in your life. It can lead to different job opportunities. So I'm a really big fan of not only networking, but doing it very broadly and for many more reasons beyond just is this going to get me my next job or get me my next case or my next deal? There's a lot more benefit to it than just that.

Diane Moss: I think things can flow organically once it all falls into place. I think people are one of the greatest assets we all have, both professionally and personally. And I know for myself in particular that there have definitely been networking events, conversations that have led me to pursue a specific area in the practice of law that has informed me that then I was able to speak to a client about. And so those two pieces weren't necessarily connected, but I had learned from the conversation, pursued something and then was able to speak to it in a professional context. So I think things have a way of falling together when you pursuing what you enjoy, what you like, what you're passionate about. We're all professionals, so of course we're in this role, but there are many sides to being a professional.

Megan Monson: I think everything both of you have shared really highlights the importance of trying to build your brand. And really that means a lot of different things. It's building your personal reputation, it's building your work reputation, and they all kind of start to inform who you are. And the greatest asset you have is dedicating your time and building those relationships with others. Do you have any parting words of advice for our listeners who are at the beginning of their journey and trying to figure out how to seek out these types of opportunities and where to get started?

Diane Moss: I would say think about what you're interested in, about your purpose, what speaks to you. And I believe from there you'll gain direction. Bar Associations, as Lynda's mentioned, are wonderful. Internal ERGs are excellent places to explore. Find your voice, ask questions, meet people, see if there's synergy. But also keep in mind, from my perspective, not everyone in your network will fill the same role. Be intentional about interacting with people who have different professions and experiences. It's important to have a multidimensional network, in my view.

Lynda Bennett: So I'm going to plus one everything that Diane just said. I have really two overriding, well, three, you already stole one. Be passionate about it but be authentic. One of the things I remember from my earliest forays into networking is I would go out to lunch with people that my mentor thought I should go out to lunch with. I had nothing in common with them. And I would always get in my car and be so angry that I just wasted two hours in the middle of the day, which meant I was going to have to stay up until 2:00 AM in the morning finishing my work, and I didn't even enjoy the lunch.

And so from that point forward, when I had that epiphany driving home one day, I said, "Okay, I'm not going to lunch or dinner or having a meal with anybody unless I genuinely like them as a person. So I'm going to be authentic about who I'm spending my time with, whatever comes in it." And when I did that, that took a lot of pressure off of each of the interactions, by the way, because I knew I was going to get something out of it. I was going to get a meal with somebody I like. That was what was going to come out of it. So it was a win.

The other thing is to be open. So for a long time, early on in my career, I was very personally biased against women's groups because I had a preconceived notion that people just sat around and complained, and I didn't have time for that. And I remember going to one Bar event that was a women's only thing in New York, and I walked in and I literally felt like Lindsay Lohan in Mean Girls. Nobody would let me sit at their table. It was totally clubby and cliquy, and I felt so out of place. I ran out of there and I'm like, "See, I knew it. I should never go back."

But when I got the phone call to join the New Jersey Women Lawyers, I said, "All right, I'm going to try this one more time. And that's it." And as I've already said a couple of times on this podcast, that organization changed my life. So if you don't succeed at first in putting yourself out there, be open to going back or be open to trying something slightly different because you'll find the right place for you. Keep trying. If the first place you go to doesn't feel right, that's okay. You don't have to commit for three years to go to that organization anymore. Cut it loose and move on to the next, because eventually you're going to path to the right place where you're going to get to feel comfortable and welcome and that you're contributing in a meaningful way.

Megan Monson: Well, thank you both so much for joining us today and talking about your brand building tactics and helping our listeners see the benefit of doing so. I know that this is something that most folks, in particular at the junior level, tend to gloss over or become intimidated by. And through the discussion with the both of you, you really helped showcase the importance of this and the personal gains that can result. Thank you, everybody, for joining us for another episode of the Women's Initiative: Real Talk. We'll see you next time.

Lynda Bennett: Thank you.

Megan Monson: Thank you.

Amanda Cipriano: Thank you for listening to today's episode. Please subscribe to our podcast series at lowenstein.com/podcasts or find us on iTunes, Spotify, Pandora, Google Podcasts, and SoundCloud. Lowenstein Sandler podcast series is 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.