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

Episode 60 – The Professional "Game Face" During Personal Change

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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 N. 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 I. 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: Welcome to another episode of Coffee Chats with WIN. Today, we are joined by Lesley Adamo, who I'll turn over to introduce herself.

Lesley P. Adamo: Hi, thank you so much for having me. So, I'm Lesley Adamo. I'm Vice Chair of the tax practice here at Lowenstein. I'm also the office managing partner of the New York office, and I sit on our management committee as Head of Strategic Growth and Initiatives.

Jessica Stewart: To start off today, can you please give us a brief overview of your career? How'd you end up with all of those positions that you have?

Lesley P. Adamo: So, when I was in law school, I wasn't quite sure what type of law I wanted to practice, like most law students. I was an economics major in undergrad. I knew I really liked numbers and business, so I thought I might enjoy tax law.

So, my 1L summer, I was fortunate enough to have a summer position at a Big Four accounting firm and I enjoyed it, but I decided to go to a law firm for my 2L summer, and I was at Winston & Strawn. I was very excited to do tax work, except we were in the middle of the financial crisis at that point, and so there really wasn't any tax work to do, or not a lot of tax work to do, especially for a summer associate. And so, I spent most of the summer actually doing litigation. And by the end of the summer, I was really excited to join the litigation group at Winston & Strawn.

When I graduated law school and finally started working as a first-year associate, the financial crisis was not as acute and really, corporate work had come back. So they needed a tax associate, and I was asked to be in the tax group, not the litigation department as I though I was going to be in, and I started working as a tax associate and I loved it. I was very fortunate to have a great mentor, Ed Cohen, who was the chair of my practice, and I worked very closely with him and the others in the group doing tax work for high-net-worth individuals, tax claim for multinational corporations, hedge funds. It was really interesting, except I got a taste of transactional work and decided I wanted to try to pivot and do a little more transactional work.

I talked to a recruiter, and I said actually to the recruiter, "Maybe now I should think about in-house. I tried big law, I think maybe it's not for me." And he said, "There's a law firm called Lowenstein Sandler, you should check it out." And I had a meeting with Brian Silikovitz, and I loved Lowenstein. It was great. It felt like a great fit for me, and I transitioned to the firm in November of 2013. I started in the tax group as beginning, I guess, as a fourth-year associate right about then. And in 2018, made partner here, and after that, took on more responsibilities, became Vice Chair of the tax practice a few years later. And then I was able to serve on also some committees over time, missions committee and operating committee, and started helping with New York office management matters, and that's how I got to where I am today.

Lauren Russell: Thanks for that. So, with your career so far, what do you think is the biggest risk you've taken?

Lesley P. Adamo: It's interesting. I think the funny thing about risk is when you look at it through the rearview mirror, it looks a lot smaller. Right? But in that moment, when you're facing whatever the decision is that you feel is really risky, it feels really acute.

When I was coming up for partner, I was about counsel level. I really started thinking about wanting to have children. And I had that moment, which I think a lot of women have, which is, can I do this? Can I have the family? Can I have the kids, and also have the career that I've been working really hard to have all of those years before that moment? And I knew I was going to be up for partner soon.

And I was actually at a WIN cocktail event. I was sitting next to an M&A partner who has a family. And I said to her, "I'm kind of struggling with this. I'm thinking about looking in-house, or thinking maybe I should go off track. I don't know what to do." And then she said, "Just go for it. Right? Have the family, and you can always opt out later if you decide you need to. You can always shift and change things if you need to, but don't take yourself out of the game." And that was the best advice I've probably received in my career, was that idea of that just go for it, take that risk. And so, I ended up actually having my daughter in January of 2018, the year I was up for partner. I was out on maternity leave the first few months of the year, came back, was lucky to be staffed on some great deals, and made partner December of 2018. And so, I was very happy I didn't opt out in that moment.

I think there's also, and again, it feels like a risk, but probably isn't as big of a risk as it feels like, a risk of not hiding the duality of being a mother and having this career. And I try to keep that in mind when I'm at the firm and to really bring my whole self to work. And I talk openly about the struggles of sometimes the balance and what it takes to have the career I want and be as present for my children as I also want to be. So again, I think that is probably when I look back, what felt the most risky in my career. And I think I've always just tried to think back to that as I lean in and take on more responsibilities. And now I have two children and I like to go to all their soccer games and hockey and all that good stuff, and also be very present in my career as well.

Jessica Stewart: When it comes to building your team at work, what's something that you look for in younger attorneys?

Lesley P. Adamo: I think one of the best qualities that a junior associate can have is the desire to really find the answer and to think, "what's next?" And so, I'm very fortunate to have worked with so many great tax associates over the years, and I think what really differentiates a great associate from a good associate is an associate that thinks, "what am I going to be asked to look at next? What corner can I look around for the client?" And then try to be proactive in doing that. Another way of saying it is just acting like the client is yours and the matter's yours and you're going to be responsible for the answer. And so, treating it, every question and assignment with that same level of diligence and thoughtfulness.

Lauren Russell: So, what's something you wish you knew at our stage of your career? Jessica and I are both our third and fourth year, or maybe by the time this releases, fourth and fifth year.

Lesley P. Adamo: I think it's that careers are super long, right? And you just have to be really mindful of that. So, as I said, I started my career under Ed Cohen at Winston & Strawn. I left Winston in 2013. In 2021, Ed actually joined Lowenstein and is now one of my partners again in my tax group. I left Winston on great terms. I loved my group. It had nothing to do with the firm or the practice. I was just looking to pivot my career, and I stayed in really great contact with Ed and a bunch of other folks in that group who are still friends today. And in '21, we just had the opportunity to start working together again, and I jumped at it.

And so, for me, it's been a really great full circle moment, but I think the legal community's small, the world is small, careers are long. I think it's just staying in close contact and being mindful of that is really important. And I guess I did not see that coming, for sure, when I left Winston in 2013.

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

Lesley P. Adamo: So, it's summer right now, and so these summer afternoons, definitely at the beach with my children. In the non-summer months, we're running around New York City, usually the village, chasing after them and a million birthday parties and activities, but it's actually quite enjoyable.

Lauren Russell: All right. And now for final and most important question, how do you take your coffee?

Lesley P. Adamo: Oh, I'm a sucker for a non-fat latte, so I could do lattes all day long.

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

Lesley P. Adamo: Thank you for having me. This was fun.

Lauren Russell: 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.