



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

Episode 49

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MARCH 2026

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](https://www.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. Welcome. Would you please introduce yourself?

Lynda Bennett: Hi, I'm Lynda Bennett, the Chair of the Insurance Recovery practice here at Lowenstein Sandler and also one of the founders of WIN.

Lauren Russell: Great. So, how'd you end up here today? Can you please provide a brief overview of your career?

Lynda Bennett: Well, I'm happy to do that, take that walk down memory lane. It is amazing to me that I've been practicing law for 32 years as of this year, which is crazy. And how did I get here? Well, I wanted to be a lawyer from the time I was in fifth grade. My mom told me I was really good at fighting with people and planted the seed. And when I went to law school, I found that I just really loved the law. People would say, "What kind of lawyer do you want to be?" And I said, "I don't

care. I love it all." I just loved every one of my classes, except for maybe tax. But really, I did. I loved every one of my classes.

And when I got out of school, the job market was not great. I did not go to a very well-known law school. So, finding a job was very hard. And through my mom's network, I actually met with somebody who worked at a firm that did insurance recovery, and I was like, "I'll try this and see how it works." And 32 years later, it's worked out very, very well. So, it's been a rewarding career, but not one where I graduated law school saying, "By God, I want to be an insurance lawyer." Some of it you have to make the most of opportunities that are presented to you.

Jessica Stewart: So, in your 32-year career, what do you think is the biggest risk that you've taken?

Lynda Bennett: As I look back, I would say the biggest risk that I took was leaving Lowenstein Sandler when I was a partner here for a couple of years. I had a couple of very beautiful small boys at home, and I was starting to develop a little bit of my own business, and also had a lot of responsibilities and demands from lots of different partners at the firm, because my practice area kind of touches every area of the firm, and it was starting to feel overwhelming.

And so, I decided to leave big law and try to find a better situation for me at that point in my career, and people told me that I was crazy to do that, and it's something that I don't regret at all, because I became a much better lawyer in my time away, because I had to take on a lot more direct responsibility, but I also loved this firm very much and kept in touch with people.

And so, as I look back now 32 years later, taking risks doesn't mean you have to take a flamethrower on your way out the door. You can actually continue to navigate along your career path and think about all of the different competing factors that you're trying to balance and keep taking your steps. And you don't have to slam a door shut behind you when you take that kind of leap but just make sure that you're doing it intentionally and carefully.

Lauren Russell: So, since you've been back, you've been a real leader here at Lowenstein. And when you're building your team, what is something you look for, especially more junior attorneys when you're staffing your matters?

Lynda Bennett: So, the most important thing that I'm looking for is high energy and enthusiasm about learning the practice area. I, in 32 years, have still not met one person who graduated law school wanting to be an insurance lawyer. So, my practice area is a little hard to get people interested in. So having high energy and

genuine curiosity about the specific type of work that I do is an important factor but so is being an excellent legal writer, an excellent thinker, and being very responsive.

These are all the keys to success in my team, and I think on many teams, is really having junior talent that is interested in learning their craft, excelling at their craft. I tell people on my team all the time, "There truly is no such thing as a stupid question as long as you've thought about it." And a lot of times, when you come to me with the wrong strategy or you're moving in the wrong direction, that's when you learn the most, and I always welcome people if there's a reason behind the question that they've thought about, that's a home run because when they're right on point, I can say, "Great job. Keep going." And when they're not on point, I at least understand where they were coming from, why, and then that opens a broader discussion to redirect them down the right path.

Jessica Stewart: So, Lauren is a third-year associate and I'm a fourth-year. What is something that you wish you knew at our stage of your career?

Lynda Bennett: I think one of the most important things is no one cares more about your career and your development than you. One thing that I see a lot of junior attorneys do wrong is try to figure out how to work the system and figure out, "Well, how many hours should I be billing? Who should I be working with?" as opposed to really thinking about, "In the next five years, what are my goals for my career path, and then what are the skills and the opportunities that I need to reach those goals and set the new ones?"

So, putting your head down, just doing a good job has consequences. And the consequence is you might be grinding out a lot of hours, but not really stretching, growing, learning into the broader areas of your practice area, what you want to do with your career. So, having a regular check-in with yourself and with the people that you have in your sphere, whether they're inside your practice group or, as we do with the Women's Initiative, people inside your firm.

Just having that regular self-check-in of, "Am I going through the motions?" or "Am I getting the right opportunities, developing the right skills that will keep me having a lot of options as I move forward on my career path?"

Lauren Russell: So outside of work, where can we find you on an ideal Saturday afternoon?

Lynda Bennett: Well, that, of course, depends on the time of year. From May to September, this Jersey girl is down at the beach, and I'm usually sitting up on the beach listening to tunes and looking for frolicking dolphins and other interesting things that you see up on the beach. The people-watching is amazing, of course.

But outside of that time frame, I would say that I enjoy watching football, college football or otherwise, and really love to do two-hour brunches with friends on a Saturday or a Sunday in particular, given our schedules. Not having to wolf down my meal is a very nice luxury that I have come to enjoy and treasure very much.

Jessica Stewart: You mentioned at the beginning of this episode that you founded WIN. Tell us why you founded WIN and what it's meant to you.

Lynda Bennett: So, WIN started just about... We're into our 11th year this year, and WIN really started as a result of a conversation that I had with Natalie Dallavalle, who was a counsel at that point in time in her career, and I was a partner and had some decent contacts and had been involved in a women's association outside of the firm, and I had gotten a lot out of that experience in terms of leadership, in terms of camaraderie, in terms of mentorship.

And Natalie said to me, "Why don't the women here ever just get together and talk about what it's like to work at the firm or move along my career path?" Some of the things that we were just talking about, and I said, "I don't know." I think a lot of women's initiatives at that point were much more formalistic, much more directed specifically toward rainmaking and developing the skills to be a rainmaker and networking with other women for the purpose of getting business.

And I certainly had the experience through my work with the New Jersey Women Lawyers Association of seeing the real value of just connecting with other women who were trying to make partner, were trying to develop a book of business, had small children at home, had elder care issues, because women, in particular, get loaded up with a lot of external time commitments and life requirements outside of this very, very demanding profession that we work within. And so, what we wanted to do was really create a community inside of Lowenstein for women who were interested in sharing on some of those issues. And so, that's how we got it started and why we got it started.

Lauren Russell: That's great. And within Lowenstein, we do a lot of programming at WIN, and we talk about networking and business development, and I think we spoke last week, and you spoke on a panel about that, and I think it's important that we discuss that here as well. Now, at what point in your career did you start thinking about networking and business development in a serious and organized way?

Lynda Bennett: The organized part took a lot longer, but starting to think about business development and networking, I really stumbled into it in part because of the firm that I had worked at when I started my career. That firm was very big on

people writing articles about insurance-related topics. So, as a very junior associate, I was exposed to doing that, and I found that to be very helpful in my early career development because I wasn't just writing a brief. I wasn't just going and finding a case and reading it.

Those kinds of articles and alerts are written in plain English and in terms that are understandable to businesspeople, and that just helped me learn a lot more about my practice area. So, I don't think I thought of it at that time as business development or networking, but that certainly was when the seed first got planted.

But when I came to this firm as a fourth-year associate, I was still continuing to do the writing, and the partner that I worked with here did a lot of speaking. So, I started going and watching him do speeches, and then when he thought I was ready, his hack was to commit to a speaking gig and then bail out and send me. So that was also a little trial by fire, but that too led me to understand the importance of putting my name out there, meeting other lawyers that then would know what I do.

So those kinds of seeds that got planted, there was certainly not a one-to-one correlation. I didn't go speak and get a new matter, but it was more developing and enhancing my brand, that then led to... I always tell the story, I spoke on a panel on construction-related issues, and literally four years after I gave that presentation, somebody who sat in the audience and heard my half-hour speech on that called me up, because they were involved in a construction defect case. Insurance was a huge part of it.

And this person that I had never met or known said, "Oh, after you gave that speech, I wrote down, 'She knows her shit,' in the book that was handed out with the materials." And I got a huge case out of that. I mean, it took four years for that to happen. So, getting organized about it really happened more after I became a partner.

And one of the things that I would love to impart on this podcast and that when I talk to all the younger folks who are starting their networking and business development journey is, it truly is a journey, and there are a lot of swings and misses, and it takes a lot of persistence and resilience and grit to keep going and finding those people who are going to be really good connectors for you. But the payoff pitch is that when you do it, the exhilaration that you get when something lands is really second to none. It becomes addictive for some of us.

Jessica Stewart:

As a leader in the firm, how, if at all, do you think that your leadership style has changed over the course of your career?

Lynda Bennett:

I would like to say I've become a softer, more approachable leader, but I think people on my team might challenge that a little bit. Yeah. So, the leadership issue is one. It just takes time, experience, and, again, a lot of swings and misses on things that work or don't work. But what I do want to say, and I've referenced it a couple of times, but it really was a formative part of my career was getting involved in the New Jersey Women Lawyers Association.

People can find lots of organizations, but getting involved in a nonprofit organization, I had no clue about leading anything when I got involved in that group, and it was very helpful to learn just how to run a board meeting, how to build consensus when people are not agreeing on the direction that the organization is going to go.

So I would encourage mid-levels, get involved in those kinds of organizations, because you'll get to see lots of different leadership styles, and that was another thing that I've done over the course of my career as I've gotten into more leadership roles is really watching and learning from other people, both things that I'm like, "Wow, I want to be more like that person as a leader," or "Yeah. I definitely don't want to lead that way. It's not authentic to my style, or it's not resonating with people to kind of come at an issue in that way."

So, finding training grounds for yourself very early in your career is a great thing. And I say this tongue in cheek, but it's actually true. Particularly in our profession, getting involved in affinity groups, bar associations, nonprofits, truly, if you show up to three meetings, you will be on the board. You will be running something if you show up three times in a row.

But take those opportunities, because you'll get to have impact for the organization that you're involved in, but it really is a great building block for you that translates very much into practicing law, developing business. And for those that leave private practice and go in-house to those kinds of positions, you still need those leadership skills.

And in some ways, I think from speaking with my friends, it's even more challenging in those situations, because your businesspeople are your clients. They are laypeople and finding ways to lead and have impact in what you're trying to do is challenging. So, the earlier that you start working on toning up that muscle, the better you're going to do in your career.

Lauren Russell:

Is there somebody you've worked with who you've really liked working with and wanted to emulate their leadership style, and is there something specific that stuck out?

Jessica Stewart: Or the opposite. Is there someone's leadership style that you found really ineffective, and what made it ineffective?

Lynda Bennett: So, I'll answer that question this way. At the time that I was entering the partnership window, that coincided with me starting my family, and this was back at a time when there weren't women partners who had children at the firm. So, anyone that thinks, "Well, I have to find somebody that looks like me in order to make something happen." Not true.

But in terms of leadership and just development of my career, at that moment in time, I had the chair of my practice group had very specific skill sets. He was exceptional at settling cases. He was a master strategist, and I sucked up and absorbed everything I could learn from him about how to do that. He also was very comfortable in that speaking and writing model of developing business, but that was it. He didn't want to go to court. He didn't want to be out in the big room collecting business cards back at that time.

And so, I found another partner here who had the litigation skills. And so, I started to build a collection of different leaders to watch and learn from and then develop my own authentic style from within that. And I think it's important, as you move along your career path, you are going to need more influences and more data points to continue working on and refining your authentic style of what kind of lawyer you want to be, what kind of leader you want to be, what kind of impact you want to have.

That's what's worked very well for me. I take a little bit of this from that person, a little bit of that from that person, a little bit of that from that person. And one of the things that I definitely have rolled forward from my original mentor, the guy that hired me out of law school, was the importance of saying thank you and acknowledging hard work, and giving me very direct, clear, constructive feedback when I wasn't getting it right.

I will share with you the first time I got back something from that partner that was not what he wanted, and there was red ink spilled all over the page of how I got this thing totally wrong. He gave me the feedback, and I started crying in his office. And he felt so terrible, he sent me flowers. I'm like, "This is not how this is supposed to work. I'm the one that screwed up."

And, I mean, that happened 32 years ago, and I still remember it, because getting the constructive feedback is very important, and clear, constructive feedback is really important to the development of your career path, but there's a way to deliver it that is encouraging and enhancing and constructive, and then I have worked with others that don't follow that model.

And so, I try very hard when somebody crushes it and does a great job on my team, they hear all about it. When somebody swings and misses and they don't do it well, they hear all about it, but in ways that are intended to be empowering and constructive and have people continue to develop their skills.

Lauren Russell: So as someone who sought out mentors and looked up to leaders, and as more junior attorneys very earlier on in our career, what is something you look for when you're mentoring associates or more junior attorneys?

Lynda Bennett: Well, something that I learned when I was the mentee that I now tell people who want to be my mentee, now that I sit in the role of mentor, the way that I had a lot of people early on in my career willing to mentor me was I found ways to make their life easier because the people that are sitting in those chairs or have gotten to their point in their career that you want to be are very, very busy people, and they don't have a lot of time, but the way that you make time for them to spend time with you is to clear things off of their desk.

And so, that's what I started doing early on in my career. When somebody would give me a research assignment, I would go and do the research assignment, and then come in and say, "And by the way, as a result of the research I did, we need to serve these discovery requests. We need to amend the complaint. We need to..." So, taking tasks and easing their minds creates the time and space for the mentor to spend time with you.

And I have definitely experienced that with the many people that I mentor, both inside and outside of my group, the women involved in WIN. This is a really important labor of love for me. I want it to continue and grow and thrive, but having the time to do it all and plan it all myself is not something that can be done. So, when your friends like you and others step up and execute on ideas, that creates the time and space for us to spend time talking about the other things that are on your mind.

Lauren Russell: We've talked a lot about your career. What professional milestone are you proudest of?

Lynda Bennett: I had to pick one singular one. I would say I was most proud of arguing before the New Jersey Supreme Court in October of 2025, last year. When I dreamed of going to law school, I never dreamed of working in a large law firm. I never dreamed of making partner. I never dreamed of a lot of the things that have become part of my career journey.

But truly, in a million years, I would have bet my entire life that I would not have had the opportunity to do something like that, and it was particularly special to

me, because, unfortunately, my mom was not able to be physically present or watching on Zoom, but I know that I was up there, and I made her very proud in the year that she passed away.

Jessica Stewart: Now, for our most important question on this podcast, how do you take your coffee?

Lynda Bennett: I do not get my caffeine from coffee. I am a Pepsi Max and Diet Pepsi drinker, and what I try to do is hold myself off until at least 11:00 AM before I have it, and some days I do it, and other days I don't.

Lauren Russell: Thank you so much for joining us, Lynda.

Lynda Bennett: Thank you. Appreciate being here.

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 and your community, and don't forget to tell us how do you take your coffee.

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