



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

Episode 51

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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, Rachel. Thank you for joining us today. I'll turn it over to you to introduce yourself.
- Rachel Dikovics:** Hi, thank you for having me. I'm Rachel Dikovics. I'm counsel in the white collar defense group here at Lowenstein, and I'm also one of the executive board members of WIN.
- Lauren Russell:** So, how'd you end up here today? Can you please provide us a brief career overview?
- Rachel Dikovics:** I can. So, the day after I graduated college, I went to work for the late Senator Frank Lautenberg. I had been interning in his New Jersey office during my senior

year of college, and the timing worked out for me to step into a full-time role literally the day after I graduated. So that was a lot of responsibility for a 22-year-old, but it was an incredible experience. He passed away about a year after I started working there, and I went to work for related companies, and full circle, they came over to Lowenstein as a client with one of our real estate partners, Julia Sanabria, a couple of years ago, which is really cool. I worked for their head lobbyist, essentially, who was their head of government relations for New York for a couple of years. And during that time, I started to feel like I didn't want to be in a, sort of, assistant role forever and started thinking about what the people I looked up to had in common. And I realized that they were all attorneys.

I thought back to when I was in college, actually, I was an English major, and one of my professors told me that law schools love English majors. And at the time, I didn't really understand why that would be true. But having gone on to law school, I came to understand why that was true. During law school, I summered at Lowenstein, and I came back as a first year, and I've been here ever since.

Jessica Stewart: What do you think is the biggest risk that you've taken in your career?

Rachel Dikovics: I was thinking about this earlier, and I think actually the biggest risk I took was leaving what was a pretty comfortable job to go to law school. There were a lot of unknowns for me going into that. No one else in my family was an attorney. It was a big financial risk, but I felt like it would be worth it ultimately to get the kind of credential that could hopefully keep me employed for the rest of my life as long as I'm working and would allow me to really qualify myself for roles that I otherwise couldn't have achieved just by working my way up in a company. And I think it was the right decision.

Lauren Russell: Yeah. Now you're in a much more senior role. So, what is something you look for when building your team?

Rachel Dikovics: So, when I'm building a team that includes people more junior than me, one of the things that I think is the most important is people who are proactive, who look for ways to be helpful, potentially before they're asked to do anything, who are trying to take things off the plate of the people who are senior to them on a case. One of the things I always tell junior people if I'm asked for advice is that when you're pretty junior and there's multiple people on the case, you should look at the more senior attorneys as though they're your clients. Whereas when you're the more senior attorney on the case, you're probably reporting directly to the client. But for the junior folks, I think that's a really helpful perspective to have.

And then the other thing I'd look for is the people who are nice and have a sense of humor. I like to try to have fun at work. I think if everybody is extremely serious all the time, it gets boring really quickly. And so I try to find people who have a sense of humor too.

Jessica Stewart: Lauren is a third year, and I am a fourth year. So, as a more senior attorney, what is some advice that you would give attorneys our level?

Rachel Dikovics: Sure. So, this might not be typical professional advice, but I think looking back on the last 10 or so years of my life as my legal career has formed, to me, the most important personal choice you can make as a relatively young person, especially as a relatively young woman, is who you marry. I think that is so true in a career that is demanding. If you intend to stay in this career and you intend to build a family, whatever that means for you, you need to give serious thought to who you are spending your life with because that person has to be able and willing to support you in lots of different ways. It's not always easy to be a woman in the law, especially as you go through things like having kids or dealing with sick parents or anything. This is a really demanding career and it's different than a lot of other careers.

And I really think that you have to be extremely intentional and thoughtful about who you are committing to because you really have to approach things as a team. And if you don't, we've all seen it not work out well and we've all seen it work out well. So, I think it's just a really important thing to think about when you're in your 20s or so and planning for that next phase of your life. That's the thing that I think is most important.

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

Rachel Dikovics: Okay. Ideal Saturday afternoon, I'm looking out my window and there's like two feet of snow and I'm just imagining sunshine and warm weather. My ideal Saturday afternoon would be at a park or garden with my daughter and my husband, just running around, and playing in sunshine.

Jessica Stewart: And for our last and most important question, how do you take your coffee or tea?

Rachel Dikovics: Okay. I'm a major coffee snob. So, I prefer to have my iced double espresso with a little bit of oat milk at home when possible, but if I have to do Starbucks, I'll do that. I am thinking about trying to make homemade vanilla syrup next.

Jessica Stewart: That's very adventurous.

Lauren Russell: Thanks so much for joining us, Rachel.

Rachel Dikovics: Thank you.

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.

Jessica Stewart: Hi, Mikayla. Thanks for joining us today. I'll turn it over to you if you can introduce yourself.

Mikayla Berliner: Hi, everyone. Thanks for having me. My name is Mikayla Berliner. I'm a fifth year associate in the white collar defense litigation Group at Lowenstein Sandler.

Lauren Russell: Thanks for joining us today. How'd you end up here? Can you please provide a brief career overview?

Mikayla Berliner: Yes. So, I went to Bucknell University for undergrad, graduated in 2018. I then went straight through to law school at Seton Hall Law in Newark. I graduated there in 2021. I did a judicial clerkship for one year with Justice Patterson at the New Jersey Supreme Court, and then I came to the firm following that clerkship. I was here for about a year in our litigation group, and then I left again to do a clerkship with Judge Katharine Hayden at the District of New Jersey. So that was another year. And then I returned back to the firm in the fall of 2024, and I've been back ever since.

Jessica Stewart: What's the biggest risk that you've taken in your career?

Mikayla Berliner: So, it's funny because the biggest risk I've probably taken was before I decided to come to law school. I had always set up myself to become a teacher. I went to college as an education major, and that was the path that I had for myself. And then I did a huge pivot in undergrad, and I think that was in my head a really big risk, but it's something that taught me that you never know where your career path will take you, and it's made me more open to new opportunities that pop up. And it made me go after my clerkships, even though I already had an offer to come to Lowenstein Sandler following my summer associate position. And so, I think I'm more open to taking risks because I had such an identity crisis in college over where I thought my career would be going.

Lauren Russell: Now that you're getting more senior here at Lowenstein, what is something you look for when you're building your team?

Mikayla Berliner: I think the most important thing for someone to be on a team is to be dependable, trustworthy, so this way everyone can rely that you're going to do what you say you're going to do. And on the flip side, I also think it's important when people are not afraid to ask questions, ask for clarification, tell me when they've never done something, because that just shows an awareness of how important their task is and that they want to get it right. And I think that's really important and a valuable skill in a team member.

Jessica Stewart: So, you're a fifth year now. I think you're solidly in mid-level territory. What is some advice that you would give to more junior attorneys?

Mikayla Berliner: My advice is similar to what I just said in that don't feel like you have to know everything and you're not going to know everything and no one knows everything, and you have to ask questions. Speak up, ask for help, ask for clarification, and do it early. Do it as soon as you have the question thought out. Don't wait until the deadline. And I think when I was more junior, sometimes it was intimidating to ask a question because you're revealing to someone who's more senior to you that you don't know something. But I think it's important to own that because it helps everyone in the long run, and that's how you learn.

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

Mikayla Berliner: I am probably exploring the coffee shops in Morristown, or if it's not nice out, I'm walking the halls of the Short Hills mall or trying a new restaurant in the area or sitting on a beach somewhere.

Jessica Stewart: That leads us into our last and most important question. How do you take your coffee?

Mikayla Berliner: So, this is a weird thing about me is I really don't drink coffee. I got successfully through law school without coffee and now in my fifth year of my career. And some days really do test me, but for the most part, I don't drink coffee. So, my ideal caffeine drink is a chai tea latte from Starbucks. It's the best.

Lauren Russell: Great. Thanks so much for joining us, Mikayla.

Mikayla Berliner: Thank you.

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](https://www.Lowenstein.com/podcast) or find us on iTunes, Spotify, Pandora, or SoundCloud.

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