



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

Episode 50

[Nicole Fulfree](#), [Megan Monson](#), [Rachel Moseson Dikovics](#), [Amanda K. Cipriano](#)

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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](https://www.lowenstein.com/podcast), or find us on iTunes, Spotify, Pandora, or SoundCloud. Now, let's take a listen.

Amanda Cipriano: Welcome to another episode of the Women's Initiative Network Real Talk. I'm one of your hosts, Amanda Cipriano, an associate in Lowenstein's White Collar practice group.

Megan Monson: Hi, I'm Megan Monson, a partner in Lowenstein Sandler's Executive Compensation, Employment & Benefits Practice Group.

Nicole Fulfree: I'm Nicole Fulfree, a partner in Lowenstein's Bankruptcy & Restructuring department.

Rachel Dikovics: And I'm Rachel Dikovics, counsel in the White Collar practice group, and I want to give a special welcome back to Amanda. This is her first episode back with us after returning from her clerkship.

Amanda Cipriano: Thank you for having me back. I missed it. Today's episode is a special one. This is our 50th episode. When the three of you, Nicole, Megan, Rachel, the original hosts, started this podcast, we weren't sure what it would become. I think you knew you wanted a space to have honest conversations about the realities of being women in the legal profession, beyond the platform we've created internally at the firm, and to talk about the things that don't always get said out loud. 50 episodes later, it's become so much more than that, and I'm so excited to be chatting with you today to reflect on what you've done. So, I'll jump into

my first question for each of you. Let's start at the beginning. How did the idea for *Real Talk* first come about?

Nicole Fulfree:

So, WIN was founded in 2015 by Lynda Bennett, and at the beginning of WIN we had some ground level ideas on what we wanted to do, and one of those things was programming during monthly lunches for all the women at the firm to come and meet and just chat. No scripts, no topics, and no prompts. And we started to think, what if we could make this a broader conversation that includes everyone and focuses on some of the issues that are particular to women attorneys. And so, we started having prompts based on current events or topics that were proposed, and we would talk about them, and the conversations were great.

We were actually really surprised about everyone's openness and the type of thought sharing that was going on in that room. And so, after a couple of years, these discussions progressed into deeper researched conversations. And Lynda then had the idea for the three of us. And I think it was pretty much like, you three are going to start a podcast, go do it. And obviously we very much value her advice. And so, we just ran with it. And I think it's been history from there.

Megan Monson:

Yeah, I agree with everything Nicole said. And even prior to that, the three of us had been involved in doing a lot of thought leadership and articles on some of these issues based on those lunches. And so, this really gave us another wider reaching platform to convey some of those difficult, and real talk conversations. And we've really been astounded by the number of women we've been able to reach internally, and externally, as well as men who found the perspectives refreshing.

Rachel Dikovics:

Yeah. I am such a convert in terms of firm podcasts. I was really a skeptic when we started this in, I think it was, 2021. I thought, "This is pointless. Nobody's going to listen to this. Who wants to hear us talk about these things?" And here we are 50 episodes later. And we have, I think, some of the top engagement stats out of all the podcasts that we produce, which I'm really proud of. We have found that women really engage with this format. And I think some of our male colleagues engage with this format too but we'll talk more about this later. But we hear from women who are attorneys, women who are not attorneys, women who are senior in their careers, women who are very junior in their careers, law students, that they're listening to this podcast, and they're interested in what we have to say. So, it's really been an amazing platform for us to speak about issues that are important to us as professional women, as attorneys, as mothers, and we're really looking forward to the next 50.

Amanda Cipriano: And I will say, even in the year that I was clerking, I shared so many of these episodes with different women I met in that experience, people who were going back to firms, people who were asking me for advice, I was able to say, "Actually, my firm has a podcast on this, not to self-promote." So, it has been really impactful here and outside of the firm. So, looking back over the last 50 episodes, there are so many conversations that stand out. Can each of you talk about your favorite episode, and tell us a little bit about why it was so important to you?

Rachel Dikovics: Sure, I can start. I have a couple that really stand out for me, but I think if I were to choose the defining episode of the podcast, it would be one that we titled "The Conversation You're Not Having: Pregnancy, Complications, Miscarriage, and Other Loss At Work." We put this episode out, I think, in early 2022 at a time when all three of us had experienced one or more of these things. It was a very personal episode. And I know I got so much feedback from women who were in the firm, outside of the firm, people I hadn't talked to in years who saw this posted on LinkedIn, who said, "I can't believe that you talked about this, and that all of you talked about this, and that these are the things that are being talked about in the open at your firm." And they're still so taboo in so many settings, even amongst women.

I think in corporate settings, people are shy about talking about some of these things. And I feel like that's really such a great example of what WIN has become at this firm, that the women are willing to share their most personal experiences, and support each other through them. There's a lot of other interesting episodes. Another one that's a real favorite of mine was a more recent one that we titled "Parents Under Pressure: The Surgeon General's Warning About Parental Stress." And that followed, I think it maybe was in 2024, a written warning from the Surgeon General of the United States that talked about the impact of parental stress, and how today's parents are functioning much differently than prior generations of working parents. And that's a theme that I think you'll hear we're pretty focused on.

Nicole Fulfree: As far as my favorite episode, I hate to repeat since there's 50 episodes to choose from, but I have to say the most meaningful to me was, without a doubt, the pregnancy complications and miscarriages at work, I think. And so yet this topic was very personal to the three of us, so we could speak about it really authentically, and from a place that would, I think, really give the other women at the firm, and beyond the firm, a feeling that we were authentic, and where we were coming from. I'm embarrassed to admit that even with the platform that we've been given at the firm, and the supportive nature of our firm with respect to women, I'm embarrassed to say that I was nervous to tell my practice

group leader just about when I was pregnant, and not because of anything about him. He's wonderful, and so supportive of women.

But I think just having to say that I'm going to be stepping away from my career for a little bit, it's a scary thing for a woman to have to say when you're coming up in your career. And so just to take that one step further to have a complication, or a miscarriage on top of that, it's just the level of stress that you're experiencing can be very high. I think having people talk about it, I think it's so important to reduce the stigma that there is surrounding the topic, and to reduce the isolation that you can feel when you're experiencing these things. Miscarriage and pregnancy loss, in particular, are still often treated as private, or even taboo topics, and that silence can make people feel like they're the only one going through it, even if they're definitely not. And hearing other people speak openly about it can be incredibly grounding, I think, and can normalize the experience, and let you know that you have support at work.

Another important thing about having these conversations out loud is that I think it breaks the penalty of silence with which disproportionately affects women. When no one talks about these experiences, I think the default assumption is that any change in performance or availability is a personal shortcoming. And talking about these things provides really helpful context that's needed. And I think it can help shift the narrative from what would be maybe she's disengaged or she's not paying attention or she's not at the top of her game to she's navigating something really significant in her life, and like, how can we support her? And I think when leaders or colleagues are able to talk about these things amongst each other, with the degree of openness, I think it gives a signal of safety to the other women at the firm because people aren't spending their energy on hiding what they're going through. They're actually getting support at work. And that's just, I think there's no question that this topic was unbeatable in putting this topic out there, and what it's done for the women.

Megan Monson:

And in terms of what Nicole just said, I mean, that is really one of the ethos that we've really tried to embody through our Women's Initiative Network, but in particular, this podcast is having these real conversations about these hard topics because of the importance of having people talk about these things, and really the impact it could have for other people who are experiencing all sorts of different challenging experiences in their work or professional life and trying to navigate both aspects of that. And I will say in echoing both Rachel, and Nicole, while that is also probably one of my personal favorite episodes, I've also really been inspired by a number of the episodes where we've interviewed other women, either within the firm, and some externally as well, to hear about how

different people have forged their career paths, how they got to where they are, what challenges they faced, what advice they would give their younger self.

Because it's really unique in showing that not every career path and trajectory is the same and that we can all graduate law school, and there's a lot of different ways to take that law degree and use it. And so, by hearing from a lot of powerful and accomplished women, and how they've done that in a variety of ways, I think has been really inspiring, not just to me, but to others. And I found that those episodes can sometimes have a broader reach because people start amplifying that within their organizations. And so, it continues to promote the podcast series beyond just people at Lowenstein, or who are interested in our networks.

Amanda Cipriano:

And I think that all of your examples kind of show how relatable this podcast can be, again, inside the firm, outside the firm. I'll also say one of my favorite episodes was the pregnancy complications episodes. As someone who doesn't have children, hasn't tried to have children yet, it really taught me how to address these issues with people in my own personal life. And then even Nicole mentioning safety, I feel like if there ever came a time in my career, I would feel very comfortable saying something to people I work with because of you three. And I think you should really take to heart how impactful that is as someone who looks up to each of you. But in addition to that, and kind of relatedly, some of my favorite episodes have been the resiliency-based episodes, guilt, burnout. I think those are things that affect everybody.

And I feel like our generation is more akin to those types of episodes now. So, hearing from you, and hearing your practice tips, I sometimes go back when I need advice on how to address certain things at work, and I'm able to take notes. If Rachel says something, I'm like, "Okay, I work for those people." But those have really meant a lot to me. And I think what's been consistent across all of these favorites is honesty. This is why the podcast resonates with so many women attorneys.

What does reaching the 50th episode mean to you?

Megan Monson:

So, I'll start, and it kind of stems off something Rachel mentioned at the onset is that when we started this, I wasn't really sure what to expect, and I'm blown away by the reach that we've had with the podcast, the engagement, the number of people who not within Lowenstein who've reached out about listening to the podcast episodes and have been either moved by, found helpful advice, and not just people in the legal profession. And so to me, I've just been really proud of what we've accomplished in terms of the platform, not just with the three of us, and you, Amanda, but anyone who's been involved in the

podcast. And it's just really a testament to the importance of the topics that we're talking about, and really the relatability of it.

Nicole Fulfree:

And yeah, on the topic of relatability, I think in law firms, there can be an expectation, or a perspective in up and coming lawyers that you just have to figure it out when you're trying to navigate your career, and you don't always have visibility into how other people are doing it. And I think there's an inclination in big law to kind of puff up your chest and pretend it's easy and like I've got this because that's what's traditionally been encouraged. But I think what's really cool about what we've tried to do with *Real Talk*, and the part that I'm really proud of is that we've kind of taken the opposite approach, and we've tried to pull back the curtain a little bit and talk openly about hard moments and non-linear career paths, the doubts, and the decisions that shape where we end up. And so, I think it's really helpful to highlight that there's more than one way to succeed.

There's more than one way to approach your career, and having open conversations that are vulnerable actually enable you to forge stronger connections with the people that you work with, and are better for your career in that way. And so, reaching 50 I think shows how much there is to say, and I think we're just getting started.

Rachel Dikovics:

Megan reminded me of a great quote recently, "If you can't see it, you can't be it." I think in our case it might be more if you can't hear it, you can't be it for this particular format. But I really think it's true. I think that our generation is privileged to be able to be open about who we are outside of work. And in large part, that is thanks to the women who came before us in these kinds of roles, and I think they often, especially at the point in their careers where we are now, didn't feel like they were able to be open about having kids and having to go places and other issues that women face. I think women used to have to just kind of act like men, for lack of a better way to put it, in order to get ahead.

And I don't think that's the case anymore. And I think that's really in large part to our generation of women being out there talking about these things, and saying, "These are things that matter to me, and I'm not going to hide that I have a life outside of my career. My career is part of my life, but it's not my complete life." And I know we always appreciate our male colleagues being open about those things, too, and find that very supportive. But really to me, that's the point of this podcast and of so much that we do in WIN is to try to allow our women attorneys to be the best, most supported versions of themselves.

Amanda Cipriano:

And so, this may be a tough question, but what do you enjoy most about being one of the hosts of *Real Talk*?

Nicole Fulfree: So, for me, obviously chatting with the three of you comes very naturally to me. So, I love that more than most things, but I also love that I think it makes me think more critically about certain situations I encounter on a daily basis. I feel like I'm constantly observing to see what issues are at play in different scenarios that happen on conference calls or in meetings and why they might be important for women to talk about. Or I'm like, "Why did that just happen? Is there something brewing there? Do other people experience this?" And talking about it, often the answer is yes. And so, I think it's very cool to be able to curate the topics, and whatever we think is relevant to talk about, we can talk about, and we're supported in that way. And I think it's nice to be put in a position where you can identify problems and try to maybe ultimately solve them, but if not, at least we're starting the conversation, which I think is really fun for me.

Rachel Dikovics: For me, from a selfish perspective, I think it's made me a better public speaker. As a litigator, I have to do a lot of talking, and especially early in your career, it can be pretty intimidating to talk to a judge or take a deposition. And doing this kind of media makes you think a lot about tone and cadence, and how those things matter to how people perceive what you're saying. And I feel like for me, it's just been a great tool to keep honing those skills, and to improve them. And I feel like I give a much better presentation now in a lot of those situations than I did before we started this podcast. Some of that I think is just more experience over the years, but I really think the podcast has been very helpful for me in that way. And then on a more general level, I also really have enjoyed connecting with the women who have listened to the podcast.

I'm always so complimented, and surprised when candidates who I interview for summer positions, or lateral positions bring up the podcast. It really shows, I think, how much reach we've achieved.

Nicole Fulfree: And a great way to flatter us.

Megan Monson: For me, the monthly lunches that Nicole talked about was something where I found a lot of career growth and found a lot of value in my junior years of learning about different issues that women who've come before me encountered and how to navigate that. And so by doing this podcast, I really find a lot of value in paying it forward and allowing us to share more broadly the perspective of some of these really important topics that we discuss internally with a wider audience because these are really important things to talk about and not a lot of people are. So, just being fortunate enough to have this type of platform and to be able to pass on our collective knowledge and the knowledge that we learned from our other female colleagues, again, with a broader reach has been really important. And I'll add on that, that we even had a spinoff to

Real Talk that was created entirely by junior associates that we work with from conception to execution.

Anyone can really join the podcast, and it's a great way to collaborate with other women at the firm or on non-legal work. And so, it's really been a great way to open up many doors for ourselves and for the other women we work with.

Rachel Dikovics: Check out the *Coffee Chats*, a subseries.

Amanda Cipriano: And so, we touched on this a little bit, but in working on this podcast over the past four years, what have you learned?

Rachel Dikovics: For me, it's really emphasized that what we're doing here in WIN at Lowenstein is unique amongst law firms. I don't know of any other podcast like ours with multiple women attorneys talking about issues like this, especially something that's sponsored by their firm. I really think that it's a great demonstration of Lowenstein's commitment to its women, its commitment to women feeling included and supported at work, and just the resources that the firm is willing to give us, to get our voices out there on these subjects. We're not talking about our substantive practice areas on this podcast, and the fact that we have been allowed to do that for four years now, I think is really unusual and powerful.

Nicole Fulfree: I think for me, I think I've kind of noticed the power in just starting the conversation. Like I said, not every episode gives an answer, or maybe we could try to give some tips that have worked for us, but not every episode gives a solution or an answer and that's okay. Sometimes I think just hearing that someone else has gone through something similar to what you have or struggled with the same question is enough to make a difference. And I would hope that—I remember looking back when I was a more junior attorney, and I was having these really moments where I was like, "Is this something I can do, or is this not?" And I wish I had this podcast to listen to when I was younger. So, that I think people who are listening, I hope that they are more likely to say yes because they feel supported, and they know that they're not the only one that is having these types of thoughts, or struggles. And I just hope that people find support in it.

Megan Monson: I've also learned in working on this podcast, the importance of sharing personal information, and whether it's personal, professional experiences, or some of the things that we talked about on the pregnancy, miscarriages, complications episode is that people really want to hear what you have to say when they see that there's some sort of vulnerability that you're being authentic, and that makes people much more apt to take your advice to heart or pass it forward to

the extent it's relevant in other aspects of their life. So, really just differentiating ourselves in that way and being open.

Amanda Cipriano: And I think that ties into something that Rachel said even about interviewing candidates but hearing from you three about these issues, bringing these topics to the table, it makes people want to work with you. It makes me want to collaborate, whether it's on WIN, whether it's on a litigation matter with Rachel, it really makes people want to work with you when we can see that you are so open to sharing about your own lives and things that you have gone through and advice and struggles, and that's really impactful. And I think it really builds into the culture that we have at Lowenstein.

So, what do we think is in store for the next 50 episodes? Where do you see discussions going, and can you share any sneak peeks about some of the topics you're thinking about covering?

Megan Monson: So, as a general theme for this podcast, we're all about breaking barriers, and setting that bar high. So, that's going to just continue to be a theme throughout this podcast. In particular, some topics that I know I'm interested in us covering is different aspects of rainmaking, in particular for female attorneys, wellness, and health, and in particular, how to navigate that as a female attorney, and certain issues that you face as a female in a very strenuous professional job. Another interesting avenue that we're also looking to explore is trying to reach some more law students and some more associates. So, trying to demystify, and help break down some of those experiences, we think could be a really educational and helpful tool for attorneys who are just starting out in their legal career.

Rachel Dikovics: Yeah. I think that the three of us being parents of young children in this profession, those topics sort of come naturally to us. We could sit down and talk about the issues relating to being parents of young children for hours, if not days. And I think that in focusing on what junior women want and need to hear, I think those things are really important. When I was a second or third year associate, I was worried about whether I could do this job and have a family. And I think that that's a pretty common experience. And so I think the more that we are out there talking about the ways we make this work, times where it feels like it isn't working, like sharing both the lower points and the high points, and just being real and authentic about what it is like to do that is something that I think is important to junior women to hear because I think there's a lot of fear, and anxiety amongst more junior women around making their whole life work. And I think the more that we talk about those things, the better.

Nicole Fulfree:

Yeah, I totally agree. And I think I struggled with some of the same things when I was a more junior attorney. I always saw myself being a mom, and a real involved mom. And I think the traditional thought is that you cannot be a really involved mom and a partner at a big law firm. So, I think for me, what I'm really interested in focusing on is similar to what you were talking about, Rachel. I think some of these topics that challenge some of the outdated expectations of professionalism, especially law firm professionalism for women, and working parents in general. I think firms don't improve what they don't see or hear about. And when these topics are part of real conversations, it becomes a lot easier to advocate for things like more thoughtful and flexible leave policies, clear communication norms, better coverage systems, more thoughtful reintegration processes after leave.

And without those conversations, policies I think tend to lag behind the needs of reality. And while there's no doubt that these things are not necessarily gender-specific, I think there's no question that some of the approaches to these items disproportionately affect women. And so yes, focusing on challenging some of the more traditional views on being a lawyer with the goal of just at least starting these conversations, and maybe more, but things that really support the retention of women attorneys, and long-term career growth are really important to me.

Amanda Cipriano:

Well, it sounds like we have a lot to look forward to. So, whether you've been with us since episode one, or you're just tuning in now, thank you. Thank you for listening, for engaging, and for being part of this conversation. Here's to the first 50 episodes of *Real Talk*, and the next 50 to come.

Rachel Dikovics:

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