



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

Episode 40:
**Crisis Averted! Karen Kessler on Crisis
Communications and Networking Anywhere**
[Rachel Moseson Dikovicks](#), [Alessandra M. Moore](#)

JUNE 2025

Rachel Dikovicks: Welcome to the Lowenstein Sandler podcast series, the Women's Initiative Network: Real Talk. I'm Rachel Dikovicks, 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.

Welcome to another episode of the Women's Initiative Network: Real Talk. I'm one of your hosts, Rachel Dikovicks, counsel in Lowenstein Sandler's White Collar Defense Practice Group.

Alessandra Moore: And I'm Alessandra Moore, an associate in the White Collar Defense Group. Today we are joined by a very special guest as part of our career highlight series for 2025. For many people in the legal world, Ms. Karen Kessler needs no introduction. She's a famed PR manager and a fixer and is called upon by some of the most influential leaders in all kinds of industries in times of crisis. Karen, welcome to the podcast.

Karen Kessler: I am so delighted that you asked me, and I look forward to the conversation.

Alessandra Moore: So, Karen, to begin, what the heck do you do? What is your job?

Karen Kessler: Not what you do, how about that? Our firm is a crisis communications firm or some people call reputation management firm. We get involved and interface between the lawyers and the media. Sometimes we get hired first and get asked what law firm should I hire? Sometimes the law firms call us and say, "We need help with a case that's going to end up in the press." And sometimes it's some combination of the two, we get hired, the law firm gets hired and we end up being law firm adjacent during this. But it's a very tight partnership when it works well between the law firm and a firm like ours, because we need to be responsive to the litigation strategy

and be aware that anything we do is creating a record. So, we are very cautious, and we love working with lawyers.

Alessandra Moore: If I want to hire your firm, when do you typically want to engage with a law firm or a case? As early as possible, or should we get through a motion to dismiss? When is the best time to call you guys?

Karen Kessler: We have been called and gotten phone calls like, “The FBI is standing outside my office right now. I think we need your help.” I think that's a little late. We have gotten calls to say the subpoenas just arrived. That's probably a good time. We've gotten called to say they just got indicted. That could be a little late. It all depends on the case. It depends on how media-worthy it is.

Our job is also to work on all forms of communications. So that could be to your own employees, that could be to your vendors, that could be to your suppliers, whatever industry you're in. I mean, you don't really want to see the FBI walking through the halls and not have a plan of how to attack that and how to communicate, right? And the goal is to keep whatever the company is working and busy and not disrupt what they're doing while there's still this kind of activity going on. So, we always like to be brought in as early as possible, even if it's “we might settle, we might not settle, we don't know, or we might need you, we might not need you.” Better to tell us all about it and have us understand what's involved, so we can jump when the moment comes.

Rachel Dikovicks: How do people know that this is a case where I need a PR firm to be involved? What kinds of issues are you dealing with day to day?

Karen Kessler: The more salacious, the more you need us because the press is going to respond to clicks. And so, if it's something sexual, I'd say yes. So, there were years, probably less so now, but that we did for a long time, when we almost wanted to answer our phones and say, sexual harassment arrest, can we help you? Because there was one me too case after another. So everything related to that, but it's lots of things we are doing right now. We got a call last night about something we refer to in the office as executive transition. That means they're getting rid of their CEO and the board knows that they're going to need help doing this in a way that is not disruptive to the company and to their business. And they don't really want to be in the press, but they know they probably will; they're a public company. So how do we handle that?

It could be any of these social issues that are causing disruptions. It's social media issues, it's political issues, it's anything or everything that you think is so sensitive and hot to the topic or has, I mean, even

industrial accidents, somebody ends up getting ground up in some kind of machine. There's going to be people that are going to want to report on it.

Alessandra Moore: So this executive transition thing, are you interfacing with the client? Are you interfacing with the lawyers? Kind of a combination of the two?

Karen Kessler: So in this case, there's a couple of different law firms that are involved and there's a couple of different crisis firms. There's one that represents the individual. There's us, representing the company. There's right, so we have to all message this together. And if you want this not to be a big public issue, then you message it one way and your communications plan is one way. You don't put it out on Business Wire and hope that the world sees it, right? But if people do come in, do you have town halls? Do you not have town halls? How do you communicate with your employees? What are you going to say? Is the person that's departing allowed to communicate with all of their lists? If so, is it a free-for-all or are there limits on what that person can say? What is a company going to say if asked? What's going to happen when the market starts to react? Who's going to respond to that? All those kinds of issues. I started my career at the stock exchange.

Alessandra Moore: Really?

Karen Kessler: Yeah. And I worked my way to become the head of corporate communications of what was then the American Stock Exchange, which is now part of NASDAQ. So regulated public companies were how we really started because that's what I knew best, but then the business, as trends morph, we morph with them. So now it's everything and anything. I mean it's AI stuff now, it's public issues now. Should the firm make a comment about Black Lives Matter? Well, if you make a comment about Black Lives Matter as a firm, should you then make a comment on the Mideast? Well, if you don't make a comment on the Mideast, should you make it on Pride? Well, should you not make it on Pride? We need to recruit. Younger people want to see our values. Older people say stay away from that issue. It's too hot to trot. It's all of those issues.

Rachel Dikovicks: You kind of anticipated my next question, which was how did you learn to do all of this? How did you learn what the right answers are in these situations? Can you talk a little bit about how you started your firm and when and how you built up that knowledge base?

Karen Kessler: I was at the stock exchange. I graduated college. I had not a clue in the world what to do. I was an economics major. I went to school at a time when they would have recruiters come to campus and they said, "Do you

want to work in the Bloomingdale's training program?" And I thought that would be way too dangerous, way too dangerous for me. There'd be no salary left at the end of the day. "Do you want to work at Sotheby's?" Well, no, I was not really big art history person. "Do you want to work at investment banks?" So, I started interviewing at investment banks. I was an economics major, and every time I walked in one, I thought, oh, I would die. This is not my life. I had literally no clue. So, I sat over Christmas vacation and just kept ripping out articles from magazines and newspapers and stuck it in a drawer and decided I'd write to everyone that I thought was interesting and say, what would you do if you were me?

And I wrote all these letters, and I thought, no one's going to respond probably, but maybe they will. And I got a fair amount of responses back that said, "I'm willing to meet you." I was young, I was naive. I was 21 years old. I didn't think there was any reason any of these men would want to meet me, other than career guidance. Why else would they want to meet me, right? Until I walked into one of my first meetings, that ended up being my first job. And it was a big philanthropist. And he opened the door, and he was in a pair of shorts, literally, that's all. And I was a kid from Westfield, New Jersey. What did I know? I stuck my hand out and I said, "Nice to meet you. I'm here to talk about my job." If he had any other expectations, believe me, they were gone in one minute. He probably thought, this woman has a stick up her rear the size of an oak tree, right?

Alessandra Moore: This 21-year-old.

Karen Kessler: I'm 21. What did I know? I was at a navy-blue interviewing suit. He's in a pair of shorts and he was the heir to General Motors. His name was Stuart Mott. And he had a foundation, and he was giving away his money, and he was looking to hire someone to help him decide how to give away his money. And I thought, well, that sounded cool. What do I know? So, he said to me, "What are you going to do with your life?" I said, "Well, I'm going to work at Chase Manhattan Bank and I'm going to make \$14,000 a year." And he said, "What if I offered you 14,500?" And I said, "No, 14,500? Like, oh my God, I'm in."

I went back to my college, I went, it was a small school. I went to see the president of the school, and I said, "I got this job offer. What do you know about him?" And she said, "Let's call a few people that know him," because this was before you could sort of Google your way through life. And she said, "He's supposed to be crazy, but it probably is going to be a fun first job." And I thought I had nothing to lose as long as he is paying my rent. So, I took the job, moved to New York and spent three years meeting almost every phenomenally wealthy family. I mean, we worked with the Rockefellers, and we worked with just everybody and traveled

with him. He was crazy, as crazy can be. I went through two interventions with him. If my parents were smarter or more savvy, they probably would've arrested me and thrown me in jail.

Alessandra Moore: Right out of that-

Karen Kessler: Exactly. Locked me in the basement, but exposed me to this huge world in New York, which was fabulous. And then at the end of three years, when I realized this was not a career and I didn't know what to do, I sort of did the same thing, which is I called up a bunch of folks that I'd met and said, "What do you think I should do?" And one was a guy named Arthur Levitt, who was chairman of the stock exchange and went on to become chairman of the SEC under Bill Clinton. And he said, "What do you know about getting television coverage?" And I said, "Not much, but I could try." And he said, "All right, I'll give you six months." And I said, "Okay." And I'd never been even below 14th Street. I knew nothing about the markets, I knew nothing about—I didn't even read any of that. I had no money to invest. It's not like I was a, you know?

Rachel Dikovicks: A big investor.

Karen Kessler: And I walked in and found out it was just a bunch of public companies with fascinating stories about founders and companies and what they did for a living. And sometimes they did bad things, like insider trading and we had to stop them, and it was great. And then I was there when the market crashed in '87 and the world thought that it was going to be like the crash of '29, and people would be jumping out of their windows. And the press was all over us and everybody was petrified. And I thought, I'm really liking this. Why am I loving being involved in this crisis that everyone else is upset about? And so, I stayed a few more years. I ended up getting promoted. I became vice president of corporate communications.

And when I got promoted, you'll appreciate this as women, I was pregnant and I wasn't sure if I should tell them if I was pregnant or not. And so, every month that I was waiting for the promotion, the dresses got bigger and looser. I was like, so finally when it was four and a half months and I was eating my way through my pregnancy, I decided I had to tell them. And I went and told them, and he said, "You're still going to get promoted." And I thanked him. It was like the like, "Oh my God, that's so amazing of you to promote me while I'm pregnant." Because in those days that didn't happen, right. And so, I stayed for a while and became head of corporate communications, had a great time. And then it became

clear at that point, I had then two babies at that point; I'd moved to New Jersey. I didn't really want to commute to New York.

Rachel Dikovicks: And there's no work from home at this time.

Karen Kessler: Oh God, no.

Rachel Dikovicks: You're not on Zoom. You're going in every day.

Karen Kessler: No. Although he did give me a fax machine, which I thought was a gift, but I didn't realize it was only so I could work at home. And then he called me, and he said, "Listen, I'm going to take this job in Washington. So, you have a choice. You either come to Washington, you come back to New York and meet the new guy who's taking over, or you figure out something else to do." So sometimes it's getting that kick that makes you think about what's next in your life. Right?

Rachel Dikovicks: So what was next?

Karen Kessler: Actually what was next was, because I was on maternity leave, is a friend of mine called me and said, "You just moved to New Jersey. You probably don't know anybody," which I didn't. I was literally sitting in my house with two kids, "And I am working on a political campaign. Do you want to volunteer while you're on maternity leave and you can meet people?" And I said, "Okay, who's it for?" He said, "It's for governor." I didn't even know who was running. I went into the office on the first day, it was in West Orange, very close to here. And he said, "This is the guy that's going to be doing the issues. This is the guy who's the driver. This is the guy who's doing this, and this is the guy who's doing communications." I said, "Well, then what would I do?" He said, "Well, we can't make payroll. Do you think you could help us raise money?"

And I said, "Well, I know a lot of rich people. I'll try. Where's the candidate?" They said in the back room. I walked in and I stuck my hand out. I said, "I'm Karen Kessler." He said, "I'm Jim Florio." I said, "It's nice to meet you." And so, I took that ride for six months. He, about a month before the election, Florio came to me and said, "We're probably going to win. Do you want to become one of the transition officers?" I said, "Oh, that'd be fun." Again, no idea what I was doing. I said, "I mean, why not?"

So I went to Washington, I met with the Democratic governors. I said, "What are we supposed to do?" I was like, "Who gets what office?" I mean, I was focused on really the big policy issues. Like how much is my budget? Do I get a car and driver? And all the stupid stuff.

Rachel Dikovicks: And you have two kids at home.

Karen Kessler: And I had two babies at home. And then after he won, he said to me, "What job do you want?" And I looked at him, I said, "I hate this. I hate government. I hate politics." It just wasn't my vibe. I didn't want to be in government. I didn't want to do all this stuff. And so, I set up my own company and that's how I got started.

Rachel Dikovicks: And how long ago was that now?

Karen Kessler: A hundred years. No, 1993.

Rachel Dikovicks: So, we know each other. We've had many-

Karen Kessler: Not that long, babe.

Rachel Dikovicks: Yeah. Not that long. We've had many a meal together.

Karen Kessler: Yes, we have.

Rachel Dikovicks: And you were a very entertaining person to have a meal with because your phone rings at all hours.

Karen Kessler: It's off now.

Rachel Dikovicks: Mine probably isn't. So, it's just your phone rings at all hours and you never know who's going to be on the other end of the call.

Karen Kessler: That's true.

Rachel Dikovicks: And what the heck they're going to say to you.

Karen Kessler: That's true.

Rachel Dikovicks: That's the good part. Is that a little stressful?

Karen Kessler: No, that's the fun part. That's the adrenaline part. That's like when I get my motor running. Because everything is different, and every case is different, and every problem is different. And every lawyer is different, and everyone's lawyer style is different. And that's the fun part, is working from a celebrity one day and working on an industrial accident the next day and working on a case where somebody put their hands where they didn't belong the next day. That's the part that we love in our office. I think it's some kind of genetic flaw probably. But I've been lucky to find people that

have that flaw, and they work in my office, and they all seem happy doing what we do.

Rachel Dikovicks: So, has someone called you from jail?

Karen Kessler: This is weird. We've had clients who have gone away and have actually shared sales with other clients of ours and have called and said, "You won't believe it. Guess who I'm in prison with?" And I'm like, "Oh my God, you guys became friends. How great. All right. How great."

Alessandra Moore: There's the title of the podcast, network anywhere.

Karen Kessler: Network anywhere, right.

Rachel Dikovicks: So one thing that we talk about a lot in WIN and on our podcast is how we balance our professional life with our personal life. And I think for a lot of people, especially where you have your own business and the clients are calling you, there's really integration of the two. So, can you talk a little bit about how, especially when your kids were young, did you find a balance? Did you feel like you were kind of all in on one or the other at any particular time? Or did you feel like this is just my whole life and there really is no division?

Karen Kessler: You all are at one stage of your lives and careers, and I'm in a different so I'm going to tell you this, it never stops. It doesn't matter whether your kids are two or whether your kids are 32. They need you all the time. They come before everything else all the time. Their needs are big, their needs are small, their needs are everything and anything in between. I will say, there are times, and I have three daughters. So, the fact that I have girls and they're all incredibly successful and they all work really hard, and two of them are moms. And one of them said to me the other day, "You never told me it was going to be this hard." And I said, "Well, here's my counsel to you. It's never getting better. So, get used to it." And that's really true. Some people think the minute they go to school, oh, then I'm going to have it so much easier.

You don't have it easier when they go to school. You don't have it easier when they go to middle school and you don't like the kids they're hanging out with, you don't like it, it's not easier. Then you think they, they're going to get into college and I'm going to be off the hook. You're not off the hook when they go to college and you're not off the hook when they get older and have their own kids and then say, "I need help." So, I think it's one of those things you really have to just make sure that you are as present as you can be, that they get who you are all the time. And also understand that everything has a short memory. So, my kids would tell me, I'll never

forget, I was so livid. I said something to them when they were adults about that trip we took to London when you were five, to the older two, when you were five and seven. And they both looked at me and said, "We never went to London." And I was like, "Oh my God, how do you not remember?"

Alessandra Moore: That's the phrases I make.

Karen Kessler: Right? Because that's what happens is I said to somebody the other day, "Just Photoshop your kids at Disney. They'll never know you didn't take them." I mean, seriously, it's all for you. It's not for them. They need to know that you love them and care about them. But I had au pairs. That's how we chose to do it in my house. And they came from all different countries, and I was really into this, oh, it's going to be international and they're going to learn so much. They can't even remember three of their names at this point, but it doesn't matter. We're really close. So somehow, somewhere we did something right. I did something right. They did something right. And you just have to hope for the best and not think that each thing you miss is crucial. So, if you do miss a school concert, guess what? You will be upset, but they're going to move on.

Alessandra Moore: They're going to be fine. I have a mom who works, and I think seeing how much she loves her career and when she would miss things, it was for a really important reason, was a good lesson for me in hard work. And it was a good lesson. And women can do it too. I so admire the moms like Rachel, like you, who are out there working really hard. And if you have to miss something sometimes, yes, that is really hard. You want to be there, but it's also teaching your kid a lesson. It's okay to work hard.

Karen Kessler: So here's a trashy story.

Alessandra Moore: Oh yes.

Karen Kessler: And I'm going to name names, so who cares, right? But I was at an event with the former CEO of Prudential, and he was talking about his career and there were probably 200 people in the audience. And he said, "And I just want everyone here to know, I've never missed a soccer game." And everyone started applauding. And I thought, "Are you kidding me? You're applauding him, because he didn't miss a soccer game? What about all the rest of us and all the decisions we've had to make and the sacrifices we've had to make? And one guy who didn't miss a soccer game is worth an applause?" Like no, we're not judged the same way, but we can be hardest on ourselves. And that's really tough.

And so, we have to learn to get over it. So, I know Rachel, you told me that it's something that you struggle with sometimes, but honestly, you just have to really think to yourself it is going to be okay. They know you adore them. They know you love them.

Rachel Dikovicks: Yeah. I think it's kind of in the same vein as picking your battles. It's really picking what things are important enough to miss something in one field or the other.

Karen Kessler: And exposing them. I mean, I've always talked about my work at home, not, I haven't named names, but I've talked about what I do. I've talked about difficult times, I've talked about clients, I've talked, and that's also helped, because then they get it, and they understand what you do and they can be proud of what you do. And yes, I mean, when they were little did I get like, "Why aren't we going skiing with Jennifer's family? They're all taking off." And yeah, I got all of that. But now they would all say, "Oh my God, I'm so glad you're not Jennifer's mother, staying home and doing yoga 24 hours a day." I mean, you have to have something that you love and if you love it, that's going to come through.

Alessandra Moore: So you start your own company, which I'm sure had a lot of challenges in and of itself. And was it just you to start or did you hire a team?

Karen Kessler: I know people say in business school "you have to have a plan and you have to have the financing." I was just too stupid for any of that. I just thought, I'll try and what's the worst that happens? And no matter what anybody asks of me, I'll say, I can do it even if I didn't know what I was doing and I'll learn on the job. And that's sort of how it started. So, it started out with one, I had another woman who worked with me. And then I remember the first time we had to hire one more. I was like, oh my god, panic. Could she pay her mortgage? Could I pay my mortgage? Was this going to be okay to hire someone? But then after a while, listen, I still get like that. When's the next one coming in? The next big one? But after a while, you begin to really realize that you can do it, and things start to grow and things start to fall into place. And if you are honest and open and have a good social network, you can help to grow a business.

Alessandra Moore: I think that brings me to my next question in that you network with the best of them. You were one of the best networkers I have ever seen. You had one or two tips for people walking into a conference or a ballroom or an event, Networking 101, what's your tip?

Karen Kessler: I've seen a lot of this. I think there's a few things. I've seen people who go around trading business cards like they're playing cards and say, that is

not networking. Collecting business cards at the end of the day and sending a note saying it was nice to meet you is not networking. It's just not. So I would say this, one of the biggest lessons that I've taught everybody in my office, my kids, and anyone who listen is this, when you're in those meetings, in those sessions, what you're there really to do is to listen more than you talk. Because whoever you're meeting with, if they talk more, they're going to think it went really well. And that's huge, because what ends up happening is too many people walk up, they have their elevator speech, they start to give it, and then they walk away and think they've made an incredible impression.

But everybody's favorite topic is themselves. So all you have to do is ask a few questions. And people love talking about themselves. They talk about themselves. They're going to think you're unbelievably bright and talented because you've got to listen to them. And that's what they really want to do. And so, it's better to walk in a room and walk away with two or three conversations that were important and then to follow up and say, "as it turns out, I'm going to be near you. Are you free for a cup of coffee? Coffee's on me." Just really low-key as opposed to speed dating your way through networking. That just never really connects. People see it for what is, which is nothing that's real.

Rachel Dikovicks: How do you decide who to talk to in a big room? Do you figure out who's going to be there in advance? Do you have some kind of strategy you use? And then also, I feel like when we think about networking, we often think of this big room conference, but I think, and I think this is what you're saying, that's really not what networking is all about. So how do you get into situations where you're getting these organic connections in smaller groups and continuing to build your network?

Karen Kessler: First of all, you can develop as much business from sitting at your kid's soccer game as you can from going to a bar conference. Excuse me, Alessandra.

Alessandra Moore: No, I think that's right though. I really think that's right.

Karen Kessler: And people want to do business with people they like. And the reason they like you is because you're listening to them and because you're not trying to one-up them. "Oh, really? That's yours. Let me tell you about how I did—" No, they don't want to hear how you do it. They just want to know that you're listening. So that's a big piece of it. Yeah. Do I try to get a list in advance? If there's certain things, like when we get new clients, we Google everybody. That's something that I didn't have when I first started out, but your phone's sitting next to you, who's on the board? Who

are they? What do they do for a living? Are there connections, blah blah blah. And then there's this crazy SAT word we call it, called eidetic, which is like, I know it's an SAT word. Okay? So it's a memory for all things visual. So what it means is if you meet them, try to remember them. Because the worst is when you go up and say, "I don't think we've met." And they say, "Oh, yes, we have."

Alessandra Moore: Oh, that's my worst nightmare.

Rachel Dikovicks: Yeah, that's my worst nightmare.

Karen Kessler: If you meet people, you want to remember them. If you're not good with that, they're write on the back of your hand, where you met them and how you met. Make yourself notes, whatever it is, train yourself to remember. Because when you see them again and you remember, and you can remember something that they talked to you about, you're in, you're in. That's a big lesson that I have for people. And then when you join these organizations, which is the other thing that lots of lawyers love to do, right? So, I'm going to join this trade association, but if within three years it's either not a passion of yours or you're not in a leadership ladder, then walk away.

Because if you can't be a leader in one of these organizations and you just have it in your resume and attend two meetings a year and don't show up, it's a waste. It's just a waste of time. But it can be, if your thing is symphony music, you can be as successful in those organizations as you can in the people that are the Gas Producers Association. It doesn't have to be exactly the work that you do. It just has to be someplace where you can give freely, where you're going to be seen as a leader, where you have some good ideas and where you can work collaboratively.

Rachel Dikovicks: I think that's really-

Karen Kessler: That's it. I have gotten the entire list of who's going to the bar conference already.

Rachel Dikovicks: Oh, are you going?

Karen Kessler: I'm going, and I have the entire list, but I'm sorry. Is that what you were asking? No.

Alessandra Moore: Oh, thank God. Rachel's going to be there too. Yeah. Rachel's going to be there too.

Karen Kessler: Yeah. Wait, have you two seen the entire list?

Rachel Dikovicks: Well, Alessandra probably has access to it.

Karen Kessler: Well, women get on the stick.

Rachel Dikovicks: Okay, good. We'll talk after.

Alessandra Moore: We got to find that list. I think I know some people I can call.

Karen Kessler: I'm going to give you one thing if nothing else, if everyone listening to this walks away with only one thing, other than the fact that she talked a lot, everyone should have a google search turned on for themselves. So, let's start with that. Do you have one, Ms. Moore?

Alessandra Moore: No, I do not.

Karen Kessler: Okay. Do you have one?

Rachel Dikovicks: I do. And I have it for other people who are key in my professional and personal life.

Karen Kessler: I'm going to tell you a story. We had a company that was about to announce a new CEO, really excited, they thought. We're having a press conference in the morning, sent out notices to the press that this person was going to be available. The night before somebody gets arrested at a nightclub in New York for the head of a big drug ring with the exact same name as the CEO and the New York Post that morning, the headline was Druglord, the guy's name, Arrested, and the company freaks. Because at 10 o'clock they're supposed to have a room full of there to meet them. And of course, everyone's now calling up saying, coming to the press conference, because they think they're meeting the guy that got arrested and that the CEO got arrested. Now, that's an extreme example, granted.

Rachel Dikovicks: I thought everybody was just really excited about him becoming...

Karen Kessler: They were like, whoa, this is going to be an amazing press conference. You have to have one, because there's always going to be somebody with a name like yours, close to yours, about yours, or yours, that does something that you want to keep some distance from, that you want to make sure it's not you, that what you want to make sure people know is not you. And if you don't have a search on, you don't want other people to find out before you do.

Alessandra Moore: But then what do you do?

Karen Kessler: Well, it depends on what it is. I know there's like eight Karen Kesslers, one of them does regional theater in Ohio. What do I do? Nothing. I just noticed that she does regional theater in Ohio. But if tomorrow she got arrested for doing something outrageous, and I'd have to make sure that it was clear that it was not who I am. I mean, in the case of the CEO, we told them to postpone the press conference, instead to have an internal town hall to explain who they were bringing on. And then no, it was not related. And then we waited a week and then had a press conference and eight press showed up maybe, but they didn't care at that point. It could have been a big nightmare for them.

Rachel Dikovicks: This really hits a chord today. My college roommate has the same name as someone who has been outed and is now being canceled for making racist remarks to a server in Ohio. My college roommate lives in Los Angeles. They just happen to have the same name. Her company was contacted. She's received all of these press inquiries, thinking that she's the person in Ohio that's on a racist tirade to the server, when she's just in Los Angeles, had no idea this even happened.

Karen Kessler: So how did she find out it happened?

Rachel Dikovicks: The press was at the door.

Karen Kessler: Okay. So if she had a search on for her name, she could have found out before that, she could have gone to her company and say, we have to come up with a plan, because there's somebody with the same name as me that has done something awfully horrific, and we have to come up with a plan of how we're going to address this. And they could have addressed it in a way that is far more effective than probably what she's dealing with right now.

Alessandra Moore: Right, which is opening the door in the morning and having people saying, "What do you have to say for yourself?" And she's like, "Who are you?"

Karen Kessler: Right.

Alessandra Moore: Yeah, I mean, this happened yesterday, so it's, yeah.

Karen Kessler: We should have met three days ago. She should have listened and then she wouldn't be in this mess. Is that what you're saying?

Alessandra Moore: Yeah, I got to get her.

Rachel Dikovicks: She can still call Karen.

Karen Kessler: It's such a no big deal, honestly. But it's something that most people don't think about or when people are in corporate life, they just assume somebody else is monitoring for them, which is also a big mistake.

Alessandra Moore: So, what's the biggest mistake you see lawyers making in the-

Karen Kessler: Oh, a million. Oh, I'm sorry.

Rachel Dikovicks: Tell us what they are.

Alessandra Moore: Like in the PR space, if I have this high-profile case and I bring you in too late, what is the thing that you're like...

Karen Kessler: There's so many. I mean, first of all, we get involved in all kinds of aspects. So, if there's going to be a complaint, we ask to see it and we circle words and say, if you say it this way, the press is going to latch on. If you say this way, no one's going to pay attention. So we will sometimes edit. I mean, if we get a lawyer that's open-minded and not, doesn't say stick in your lane, we will sort of give some suggestions and say, can you think about doing it this way? That's one thing.

We have seen lawyers who only like to speak legalese, which is fine if you're talking to Law360, but not fine if you're talking about speaking to potential jurors or speaking to other people. So, words like complainant are not regular folk language, but it's yet how lawyers like to speak. Lawyers who try to wing it, "I'll talk to the press off the record, they know me. I've got swagger. They trust me." No, no, no, no, no. Don't do it off the record. Don't trust that your words are not going to get mangled. We're really big on having everything in writing or at least having someone else in the room when you're having these conversations and not trying to wing it yourself. There's a lot of things that lawyers do that give us a little bit of heartache, to be honest, in these cases.

Alessandra Moore: Do you help with juries?

Karen Kessler: Yeah, we just did a jury selection with a lawyer that you might know last week. We've done this more than once, where we sit there and we listen to, we come up with words, because we give them a fake press release and say, "this is what the potential jurors are going to be having to react to. They're not going to react to a complaint, they're not going to read that, but they're going to read how the press writes it." So, we'll either write fake headlines or we write fake stories, or we'll write a fake press release and say, now, if the jury hears this, how are they going to react? What are

the things that they're going to respond to and what are the words they're going to cling onto? And what sort of went by the wayside?

Alessandra Moore: I would've never thought of this.

Rachel Dikovicks: It's so useful, it's incredible.

Karen Kessler: Listen, I mean, if you have a high-profile case and somebody's life is on the line, it's a small investment to make sure that you're not walking into something that's really awful.

Rachel Dikovicks: Yeah, accidentally, right? Yeah. Wow.

Alessandra Moore: So for attorneys who are a little bit more junior in their career, and many of the people who listen to our podcast are young women attorneys, any tips for them as they're building their careers to meet the right people and get into client matters and cases that are really interesting to them and that they can have longevity working on?

Karen Kessler: Yeah. Of course, I'll have tips for anybody. Whether they're good or not is another issue, right? That's another topic. But no, I would say a few things. Really think about what it is that interests you and find one or two organizations at most that cater to that. And I don't really care if it's local to the town you live in, whether it's statewide, whether it's national, but don't over commit. Find one or two things that you really want to do and then really get involved and ask if there's some people on that are involved. If you're new, say, there's some people I could talk to, because I'm interested in getting involved, but I want to get to learn more. I want to understand more. And then, start networking yourself by meeting those people in person if you can, asking questions, telling them about you, asking all the right things to make you get a sense of who's involved in that organization.

If every single person in that organization spends their time staying at home and knitting and playing Bridge, maybe it's not the right one, but if it's a group of diverse people, men and women, all women, whatever, and it looks interesting to you and it's a cause you care about or a political campaign you care about or a community organization you care about, whatever it is, then start to really get involved and volunteer and do those things. And everybody's got a few hours in their day, even if what they need to do, they can do more of it from home. Whatever it is, get involved and start to use this as a way to walk into this world, number one.

And number two is to ask. People don't always think about giving business, but when you say, one of the things that's really I'm judged on is

if I'm able to bring in some business. So sometimes if you ever think to yourself, I would love to, I mean, there's a lawyer that I know who's at Lowenstein, who said, "I don't care how big or small the matter is. If you have something, I would love you to consider me." I was like, of course. And then-

Alessandra Moore: That lawyer was me.

Karen Kessler: That lawyer was you.

Alessandra Moore: And Karen fulfilled on her promise.

Karen Kessler: I did come through, but then you had a conflict, which was the worst. But no, if you don't ask, it's same with women who want to get on boards of directors. I'm on a board of a public company. It doesn't happen just because someone says, I happen to see someone the other day, and my first thought was, I wonder if they'd want to be on my board. It doesn't work like that. It works like that, because you say, "I would love a chance to be on your board. I'm interested in it, because I'm interested in the industry you're in" or whatever you want to say. And then "think about me when you have an opening." And if it's not you or there's anyone else you can refer me to, you shouldn't. Women in particular are loathe to do that, loathe to ask. Men are not loathed to ask, but you should not hesitate to do those things, and you never know.

It's sometimes the people you least expect who are going to pick up the phone and say, "actually, I do have something, and I'd love to know if you're interested in working on it or if your firm could take this on." And even if it's not in your area, so I pick up the phone and call you, and it's a matter that is really a tax matter, you're still going to get the credit for bringing it in, right? So, all of that matters. All of it matters. Don't be shy.

Rachel Dikovicks: Great. Thank you so much, Karen, for joining us today. These have been amazing tips and we had such a great time talking to you.

Karen Kessler: I can't be a regular and be part of this on a regular, can I be the third cohost on a regular basis?

Alessandra Moore: We would love that.

Karen Kessler: Thank you, thank you, thank you to you. And really thank you for helping all of the other women that are listening to this because I think it's hard to get advice sometimes and to not feel uncomfortable, and this is a really comfortable setting.

Rachel Dikovicks: We had so much fun with you.

Alessandra Moore: We did. Thank you.

Thanks for joining us for another episode of the Women's Initiative Network: Real Talk. We'll see you next time.

Rachel Dikovicks: 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, 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.