



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

Episode 46

[Jessica I. Stewart](#), [Lauren N. Russell](#),
[Julie Levinson Werner](#), Nina R.
Rodriguez

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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 Nina. Thanks for joining us today.
- Nina Rodriguez:** Of course.
- Jessica Stewart:** I'll turn it over to you if you can introduce yourself.
- Nina Rodriguez:** Sure. Thank you. My name is Nina Rodriguez, and I am a fifth-year associate in the litigation department at Lowenstein Sandler.
- Jessica Stewart:** Give us an overview of your career. How'd you end up here today?

Nina Rodriguez: So, after I graduated from Rutgers Law School in Camden, New Jersey, in 2021, I embarked on my first clerkship in the family division in Mercer County. And so, I did that for a year and had the opportunity to clerk for several judges while I was doing that. From that first clerkship, I transitioned to a second clerkship at the New Jersey Supreme Court, where I worked with Justice Patterson as her law clerk for a year. I interviewed for the role at Lowenstein as the pro bono fellow, and I was given that role. I spent a year serving as the firm's pro bono fellow, where I got to work on a variety of different pro bono litigation matters, arising from federal claims to the state law claims, and had a lot of experience presenting cases in court and also a lot of writing amicus briefs, everything really under the sun. It was such an amazing experience. And then from that fellowship, I transitioned over to the billing side, the litigation department, where I have been for a little bit over two years now.

Lauren Russell: That's great. So, what do you think is the biggest risk you've taken in your career so far?

Nina Rodriguez: The biggest risk I'm taking in my career is actually something that is happening quite soon. In January, I am leaving to pursue a third clerkship, this time in federal court. Obviously, stepping away from a full-time associate position isn't the most obvious or safe choice, but it's something that I know will invest long-term in my career goals, not only as experience that I could bring to the billable side, but also, I'm in my hopes to become a future judge one day. So, I am really excited. I'll be getting to work with two judges, which is a quite unique and fantastic experience, but I think just investing in myself and being willing to take that risk and do another clerkship, definitely is the biggest risk.

Lauren Russell: Congratulations. That's so exciting, but I think I can speak for Jess and I when we say we're going to miss you here.

Nina Rodriguez: Me too.

Jessica Stewart: As a mid-level associate, when you're building your team, what are things that you look for in younger attorneys?

Nina Rodriguez: I would say two things. Passion, obviously, because you do want someone who you can rely on and who is actually interested in the merits, but someone who is willing to ask questions and learn. It is okay if this is a new area of law for you; it is okay if this is the first time that you're attacking this but just being willing and open to receiving feedback and being really willing to invest in the whole case as a whole, and just to work together as a team.

Jessica Stewart: What is something you wish you knew as a law student or as a junior associate?

Nina Rodriguez: It is okay to learn, and it is always okay to continue learning. I think that there's an expectation that you'll learn everything within the first two years in practice, and while you will learn a ton and it's a tremendous effort, this is an ongoing process, and that's what makes it feel so interesting. It is okay to, in your fourth or fifth or sixth year, be approaching something the first time, but being willing and open to not only the mentorship, but the lessons that you can learn, legal and otherwise, is my biggest advice.

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

Nina Rodriguez: I love exploring around my town and finding new coffee shops to try and very unique coffee type items, seasonal drinks like that. So that is definitely something that I love to do. But something that people don't recognize about me is that I am also a really big gamer. So, I love playing whatever the newest or hottest trend or game is out there, and it's something that I really like to just spend my free time doing as well.

Lauren Russell: So that ties in really well with the most important question we're asking here today. How do you take your coffee?

Nina Rodriguez: Always a latte and definitely with some sort of creamer or sweetener, whether it be caramel or butter pecan. My favorite is the Dunkin' Donuts cookie dough. But that is only limited edition, so I am very, very much waiting for it to come back.

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

Nina Rodriguez: Thank you, guys.

Jessica Stewart: Before we jump into our next interview with another inspiring woman, we want to hear from you. How do you take your coffee? Share your order in the comments on our LinkedIn or Instagram post.

Julie Levinson Werner: Hi, this is Julie Werner. I am a partner in our employment practice group.

Jessica Stewart: Thanks for joining us today. Can you give us an overview of your career? How'd you end up here?

Julie Levinson Werner: Sure. So, I've spent my entire career at Lowenstein. I graduated law school in 1996, many moons ago. I clerked for a year in the appellate division, and I have

been at Lowenstein ever since. I knew back even then, I knew Lowenstein, I knew that's where I wanted to be, and I was very fortunate to end up here.

Lauren Russell: That's great. So, what do you think is the biggest risk you've taken in your career then?

Julie Levinson Werner: Well, I guess maybe it's staying here this entire time. It's been close to 30 years. Maybe it's a risk every time I get a call from a recruiter that I don't take it, or I don't pick up, or I haven't pursued it, but I've been so happy to be here my entire career. And so, I guess it was a risk worth taking.

Jessica Stewart: When building your team and staffing your matters, what's something that you look for in younger attorneys?

Julie Levinson Werner: I think it's enthusiasm. Certainly, somebody who is excited about the subject matter, who wants to learn about it, who shows initiative. Those to me would be the biggest qualities. Initiative, actually, among other things I would say is probably among the most important.

Lauren Russell: What is something you wish you knew at our stage of your career?

Julie Levinson Werner: I would say the importance of taking initiative, the importance of showing that you're interested in something. I think that a lot of the attorneys here respond well if you stick your head in someone's office and say, "I'm really interested in what you're working on. How can I get involved?" I think people really are receptive to that. Taking ownership of your career instead of just taking what assignments are handed to you, taking ownership to find the kind of work that you want to do and finding a way to do it.

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

Julie Levinson Werner: Well, I don't know if it's ideal, but I guess I would say Trader Joe's is probably my Saturday afternoon routine.

Lauren Russell: And now our most important question, how do you take your coffee?

Julie Levinson Werner: How do I take my coffee? I would say it is Starbucks, mostly black, just a smidge of skim milk.

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

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 in your community and don't forget to tell us: how do you take your coffee?

Rachel Dikovics: Thank you for listening to today's episode. Please subscribe to our podcast series at Lowenstein.com/podcast or find us on iTunes, Spotify, Pandora, or SoundCloud. Lowenstein Sandler podcast series are presented by Lowenstein Sandler and cannot be copied or rebroadcast without consent. The information provided is intended for a general audience. It is not legal advice or substitute for the advice of counsel. Prior results do not guarantee a similar outcome. The content reflects the personal views and opinions of the participants. No attorney-client relationship is being created by this podcast, and all rights are reserved.