



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

Episode 25: Secrets to Success as a Junior Associate in Big Law

By [Nicole Fulfree](#), [Chandra Shih](#), [Amanda Cipriano](#), [Megan Williams](#)

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Amanda Cipriano: Welcome to the Lowenstein Sandler Podcast Series: The Women's Initiative Network, Real Talk. I'm Amanda Cipriano, an associate attorney and 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/podcasts, or find us on iTunes, Spotify, Pandora, Google Podcasts, and SoundCloud. Now let's take a listen.

Nicole Fulfree: I'm Nicole Fulfree, a partner in Lowenstein's bankruptcy and restructuring department.

Chandra Shih: I'm Chandra Shih, a partner in Lowenstein's tech group.

Megan Williams: And I'm Megan Williams, an associate in Lowenstein's tech group.

Amanda Cipriano: Starting any new job can be a stressful endeavor and for those with no previous work experience in the legal industry or any relation to those in the industry, joining a big law firm can be very overwhelming. Megan and I had the challenging experience of starting out at Lowenstein at the end of 2020 when work was a hundred percent remote. On today's episode, we want to talk about things that we wish we knew before starting out at a law firm and how those tips can help jumpstart your career as a summer associate and junior associate at a big law firm. Nicole and Chandra as partners at the firm, will be sharing their perspectives as more seasoned attorneys who have helped train and mentor many junior associates at the firm.

Nicole Fulfree: So hi Amanda, Megan and Chandra. Thanks so much for joining us today. I'm excited to get your insight on some of these questions that we have and I'll dive right in with asking you about the summer program, which is a lot of new associates first experience at a law firm. So for you, Meg and Amanda, starting off with the summer program, what are some things that you wish you knew prior to that first week of the program?

Amanda Cipriano: I think one of the things I wish I knew was that a summer program at a law firm was not going to be like any of my internships I had in college. I think there's a bigger emphasis on socializing and forming relationships with people at the firm, whereas in other internships that may be a hundred

percent focused on the work or learning a trade or something like that. So I felt like there were a lot of lunches and social events that I wasn't anticipating having, I guess as many fun experiences in a job, especially my first legal job. So being able to balance my workload that I got through the program in addition to trying to form relationships, I think was a challenge I wasn't anticipating, but something that was definitely fun looking back on the summer.

Megan Williams: Yeah, I definitely agree with that. The relationship building aspect of the summer program, I think I had some sort of idea that was in store, but it certainly was a lot of fun, but a good reminder, looking back to don't be shy I think is a good piece of advice that I would tell myself from time to time, not even thinking that I was being shy, but really to encourage myself to reach out even outside of the specific events that we did and get to know the people that I'd be working with, the associates, the partners. Lowenstein was so great at setting us up to do that and everybody in the building or in certain circumstances virtually were really amenable to talking to us and getting to know us. But looking back, I think if I could have talked to more people, I should have, it was definitely, the opportunities were there. So definitely just a great opportunity to strike up conversation.

Nicole Fulfree: Yeah, and I think that's good advice that translates into the broader practice of the law. I think I also came and see the law firm experience thinking if I just put my head down and do good work, that's all I'm going to have to do. But a big part of practicing the law is building relationships and networking, and so I think that's an early introduction to that concept as well, which is a really helpful tip.

Chandra Shih: No, I think that's great and I think the other thing to keep in mind is that the career is long and one of the things that I think is unique about working at a law firm is that you could come in as a summer and then rejoin as a first-year associate and potentially work there for the rest of your career. That's certainly not the case for everyone, but it is a possibility. And so I do think getting to know the people you might be working with for potentially the rest of your career is a really important thing and I think that junior attorneys and summer associates and law students forget that they should be doing a bit of interviewing the other way, making sure it's a good fit for you long term and not just thinking, oh, will these people like me and want to hire me?

Megan Williams: That's such a good point Chandra, and it also reminds me of the fact that you can start your exposure to what you'd be doing long term during this summertime, and a lot of that is kind of learning the terminology that comes along with it. I think it's very normal to approach a summer program and have an idea of what law firm life is like, but there's plenty of terminology, plenty of specifics that you might not have context for. And so fostering those relationships, not only is it just enjoyable and there's that social aspect, but through reverse osmosis really then get to learn the type of things that you'd be exposed to on a daily basis once you're a full-time associate.

Chandra Shih: That's so great, and it's also very much the case that I think the classic question you get asked when you're interviewing for summer associate positions is what area of law do you want to do? What specific practice do

you want to have? I think it's such an unfair question because it's impossible to know as a law student what it's like to be a practicing attorney, let alone what the sort of landscape could look like for yourself.

And so one of the great things about working at a firm that does a bunch of interesting things is meeting people there, asking them what they do and seeing sort of what you want that career arc for yourself to be. And just because you're summering as a litigation associate, or a corporate associate doesn't mean that you're locked into that for the rest of your life. And so the more you're getting to know what people are doing and understanding, I think the better served you are for your own career.

Nicole Fulfree: Yeah. And to Chandra's point, as a lawyer, you're going to be spending a lot of time with the people that you work with, and so it's important that you actually like their personalities to the extent possible as well. Another issue that many high performing associates have, and I think it's just a function of being in a high demand because you are a high performer, is the ability to appropriately manage your docket. And so do you guys have any advice for junior associates who are kind of struggling to manage their docket?

Amanda Cipriano: I think my number one piece of advice that I now tell our junior associates is ask for a deadline when you receive a project. I think so often, and I still do this myself, I'll receive an assignment and, in my head, I'm just thinking, oh, I got to get this done asap. This is needed today. And then so I just put so much on my plate in the times where I ask, hey, when do you need this by, sometimes it's next week or in a few days, and so I feel like often it can be an intimidating to ask a partner or someone you never worked with, when do you need this by? Because it may come off as you're not totally a hundred percent available, but I think everybody understands that you're not only working on one thing at one moment of the day, and so just asking for the deadlines or clarifying a task I think is the number one thing that has helped me manage my workload.

Megan Williams: Yeah, I'd agree with that. For me personally, and I think it's similar to what Amanda's saying, the more I can quantify the parameters of what's needed, and by that, I mean by what date do you need it? How many hours do you anticipate a project taking? Do we anticipate other people being involved? How many? Which specialists? As many of those kinds of specs that I can get at the outset really helps me not just write down the task in my planner but put it within the context of everything else in my planner. So I think that's a really helpful skill.

Another thing that I find really helpful to the extent that you can do it as much as you can, given that sometimes schedules are pretty busy and you do have a crazy day, but you get a new assignment. Usually I like to, same day if I can at least spend 10 minutes.

Sometimes it's so hard to find those 10 minutes, even though in theory it's not that much time, but try to find the 10 minutes just to look at the document and make sure you don't have any questions. I feel like it really can sneak up on you if you put something on your calendar and you're like, okay, I'm going to get to this today, but it's okay if it slips to tomorrow and then it's tomorrow

and you're like, okay, it's the end of the day, I have to do this now. And then you look at it and you have a bunch of questions, or you needed to loop a specialist in. Those few minutes, really fight for them because they really can pay dividends as far as expediting the actual assignment itself. So that's something I like to remind myself every day, especially when things get crazy.

Chandra Shih: I think those are all really good tips and definitely that last piece that Megan was mentioning is so crucial. Spend the five minutes upfront when you get the assignment to go, do I have all the information I need to actually do this when I want to sit down and work on it?

I think the other tip that I'd have that I wish I would've known earlier in my career is once you figure out what your list technique is or Megan mentioned a planner, however you're tracking whatever it is that you're doing, take the time either once a day or multiple times a day to look over that to-do list and go, if nine of these 10 items will take me an hour and the 10th item is going to take me eight hours, why don't I work on those nine first so that I have fewer things that are hanging over my head and then commit the time to the 10th thing. Sometimes just taking that step back and reprioritizing things on your list can go such a long way to alleviating stress for you and for the 10 people waiting for deliverables from you.

Amanda Cipriano: I think I'm such a list person and so on the days that I don't readjust my list, I get stuck and I'm doing the long task where one of, item on my list is to send an email and it's nice checking off the list, and so it can just feel less overwhelming once you actually reassess what you have to do. And I think what Megan was saying too, I feel like sometimes you can get in your head about how long something's going to take or how overwhelmed you are with your workload, but if you do that little due diligence to see, all right, what is this actually asking me? I feel like a lot of times you find out, oh, this isn't going to be a crazy thing that I'm going to spend hours doing. It's actually pretty simple.

Chandra Shih: No absolutely. And leverage the people around you if you're having trouble figuring out how to prioritize or like Megan said, you don't know how long it might take you, so ask someone how long would you expect it to take, but also communicate early and often. When you're reordering your list and it might be taking you a little longer than you anticipated, you don't have to wait till you're complete with the project to go back and talk to the person who gave it to you. Everyone appreciates that check-in, and so just start to build that muscle and get used to doing it and it will pay dividends later and you'll appreciate it so much when you're supervising people who are good at doing that.

Megan Williams: I like the muscle analogy there because it really is a continuous skill. It's not something that like, oh, you work at the firm for a couple months and you've got it down pat and so does everybody else. It's something that we're all working on, all cognizant of every single day.

Amanda Cipriano: One other thing that I've found helpful is that I kind of found a buddy in my class year, and so whenever things slow down or we feel like we're really

busy, I kind of check in with them to see what their dockets like, and I feel like it helps me say, okay, I'm really busy. I'm doing X, Y, Z. This person's also really busy. It's just a busy time. Or maybe they're slow. Maybe it's just a slow time because I think there's also sometimes that fear of not doing enough, and so having kind of someone to just vet out what their situation is nice to manage your docket in terms of do I need to be asking for more work because everyone else is super busy except for me. So sometimes talking it over with someone in your same class here I found helpful just to feel like you're on task.

Nicole Fulfree: Another thing that I've found really helpful and honestly something that I still work on today is remembering the fact that you can say no, and I think this is an important tip, especially for junior women associates because I think that at times women have a little bit more of a tendency to say yes, yes, yes, without keeping themselves in mind. And when I say it's okay to say no, I don't mean that if anyone asks you to do something, you just say no. But I think there's a more artful way to do it.

And one thing that's worked for me in that I wish my junior self was made more aware of is to say, well, these are the things that I have on my plate right now. I would love to help you out on this project. If you're okay with me getting started on Friday, I can absolutely do it, but I don't think I'll be able to get it started earlier than Friday. It's a great way to kind of say no and give them the opportunity to be flexible if they can and shows that you're still interested in the assignment, and you can keep a good relationship with that person. I think I wish I was more aware of that when I was younger.

Chandra Shih: We call that the yes, but on our team, which is yes, but here are the conditions, right?

And sometimes those conditions are out of your control. Maybe you're on things and there's different partners competing for your time, and you're being asked to take a bigger role on something you're already staffed on, which is the hardest thing to say no to, right? And so, the yes but is super helpful because that doesn't have to be your fight. Let the people you're working with discuss and figure out and prioritize so I'm not in this alone and nobody, I would hope that nobody would expect you to do more than what's reasonable and more than what there are hours in the day for and all that type of stuff. So I really find that people get in trouble when they don't ask for help or ask for guidance and lean on others. So again, just communicate early.

Megan Williams: Early as you can communicate the better because it is very much a team mentality with the type of work that we do and the services that we provide for the clients. And at the end of the day, it's just getting that out the door and getting it out the door well, so just because something maybe was initially assigned to you doesn't mean that everybody's not flexible and can always find a workaround if you get really busy, but they can't do that unless you tell them. So definitely the more you talk to your team members, just the better.

Nicole Fulfree: Meg and Amanda, I know you both started at Lowenstein in 2020 when the firm was fully remote, so that's a unique experience that some of us older folk

don't have. So can you share a little bit about how you got to know people at the firm and what advice you might have for either those junior associates who did start out fully remote or new hires who are now starting out in a hybrid environment on getting to know people at your law firm?

Megan Williams: I think Amanda and I are in a little bit of an interesting position with the remote work because we were fortunate enough to summer in person, so we were summers in 2019, which I think was the last in-person summer before COVID. So we were able to have some relationships established during that time, but once we started, everything was completely remote. And so we certainly, I think leaned upon each other certainly as far as adjusting and how does your mic work here and what technology do we need to fix here and how do I set up a calendar invite here? But then a lot of that was also just reaching out to the people that we were fortunate enough to meet.

As far as building and establishing relationships for the first time fully remote, I actually think the tech group's kind of interesting in this discussion point because we are split across the country. I am on the east coast, Chandra's on the west coast, so a lot of our practice, even before COVID to my understanding was at least partially remote. And so I think that that really at least helped me in setting up Zooms and communicating via messaging or email or over the phone. I think it might have just been a little bit easier for us to just take those skills right off the bat. Amanda, I don't know if it was different for you, if you felt like most of your work and most of your colleagues were in person versus in different offices.

Amanda Cipriano: Yeah, I think with me, most of the people I work with are here. And so it was nice for me to have those connections from the summer. And I do think that if you can even just find one person to stay in touch with during your summer, I think that'll help you when you come back because you can reach out to them, say, hey, I'm starting in the fall. If you are on any matters or if you know of anybody working on interesting projects, I'd love to be staffed on them.

And I think that's kind of what helped me get acquainted when I started in the fall because I had that one mentor, Rachel, who I was able to reach out to, and she was able to tell people at the firm like, hey, remember Amanda, she's starting in the fall if you guys have any projects. And then I think that kind of helped me feel more adjusted, but then also just getting involved, especially remote. There were so many "work" happy hours or different invites on our calendar and sometimes it felt silly to be joining a work happy hour from your home by yourself or making a cocktail with yourself. But I think it was important to have those interactions because there was nothing else. And so I think now being in person, it's still important to find those groups at your firm or organizations like WIN where you can show your face to people and then people will know who you are and remember you when work comes up. I think that's helpful.

Nicole Fulfree: Thank you guys. Those are helpful tips from our virtual world associates. So guys, is there anything that was particularly difficult for you to adjust to when you first started out as an associate?

Amanda Cipriano: I think what I'm about to say doesn't apply to the first two months because we were stuck in our home. But I think once COVID restrictions started lifting, I found it very difficult to balance a social calendar with work because starting out in any job you want to be available and you want to be the person people can rely on, but then having that mentality and trying to do a good job with work in addition to life returning to normal where your friends want to hang out or people are scheduling things on weekends, that was a very hard transition, especially because we started remote and we couldn't do anything that was fun. Finding out how to balance work with life, I think was a real struggle and still sometimes can be a struggle, but still a struggle [inaudible 00:18:36] too.

Nicole Fulfree: I don't think that's one that goes away quickly, unfortunately.

Chandra Shih: I will say though, I think when you are the most junior person on the team, you have the least insight into how things work, what the flow will be like for a transaction, how to anticipate or expect things. And I think that makes it particularly tough to figure out how to have that sort of work-life balance early.

And so, I think that's a completely natural part of transitioning into law firm life is just it's really hard to know. And as you get more senior, the things that you're responsible for change in ways where I think work-life balance can be challenging in a different way, but you certainly have the ability to control your schedule a bit more. You are the person that people need to work around to make sure the call can happen. That kind of stuff makes life easier, but it's definitely a skill like Nicole said, that we all are constantly working on and it's a changing thing. And anytime you're in a client facing professional services industry, I think it's a thing we are spending our lifetime learning how to balance.

Megan Williams: Yeah, I think I definitely echo that. I think for me it was more just that general theme of predictability, whether it was with work-life balance, with docket management, with understanding what these assignments that I was being staffed on entailed and what it looked like at the end. And Chandra and I do a lot of deal work, so what's the lifecycle of a deal? What is typical, what's not? And so I think a lot of that it just comes with time and exposure and fostering those relationships and asking those questions. It all kind of comes together. So certainly, if it feels like you're just starting to work and you can see your day, but you're not really sure what your week's going to look like, those feelings are completely normal. And as you gain that experience, it's something that you'll work on every day, but it's something that will build on that progress that you've made thus far.

Nicole Fulfree: One thing that I found difficult to adjust to at the beginning, especially coming off of a clerkship where I was just working for my one judge, was the juggling that you do when you're working for a bunch of different partners with a bunch of different styles and cares about different things. And so when you're starting out, you don't know who cares about what.

And so for instance, I was working with one partner who cared so much about absolutely perfect Blue Book sites and another partner who didn't really

care about that at all, and another partner who would be so upset if I said the word I in an email and other people who would let me send out my own emails as a junior associate. And so I found myself spending a lot of time either focusing on things that that particular partner might not care about a lot, but I thought they would, or just being nervous about if I do it this way, are they going to care? If I do it this way, are they going to care?

And so it's just as you get more experience, you learn your audience that you're working for and it's really helpful once you start learning different people's styles, you get more comfortable with working for a bunch of different people. But that was a skill that I struggled with at the beginning.

Chandra Shih: Well, and Amanda talked earlier about building that internal peer network of people to ask questions of, right? About how busy they are, whether she should be looking for more work. I think utilize that same network, especially if they're people who work with the same partners or senior associates that you do to see if you can troubleshoot some of the stuff at the outset. Talk to the person who works with partner A all the time and say, are there sort of three things that I should just make sure I do whenever I'm working with partner A or is there precedent that this partner might prefer I start from?

Things like that can just be super helpful, little things you can do without having to feel like you're bothering the person to tell everything to you when there's a whole bunch of resources sitting right around you, either in person or in the virtual world who can help give you that inside knowledge.

Megan Williams: Something else that I thought, I was just thinking about now and reflecting on, and I'm curious if any of you would relate to this at the start of your careers, was having high expectations and standards for your own performance and feeling frustrated when you're in a brand new environment with a brand new set of substantive knowledge and you're not nailing it necessarily right away, even though that ends up being completely built into the structure and it's anticipated that you're learning a lot on the job as you go, that was kind of tough to adjust to, especially coming from school when you do something, you're graded on it. And so you think like, "Oh, if I am drafting this document and it's the first time I'm drafting it and I have a lot of comments, I must be horrible at this job." And kind of quieting that voice because that's not true at all. That took an adjustment period for me at least.

And certainly people, it was great to talk to people about that because people really validated that experience. And that again is where those relationships really come in handy because it's very easy. And I think especially maybe with remote work, to be really in your head and think comments equals bad and feedback is you're not performing well. And to ground yourself and to check that voice and keep it quiet and check in with your team, I thought over time it got easier. The voice got quieter, but it was something at the beginning that definitely was something to adjust to.

Amanda Cipriano: I definitely had that too. I remember, I think I drafted some kind of motion, and the reviewing attorney gave it back, gave some comments, and then made a new version of it with their edits. And when I was reading it, I was just thinking to myself, this is nothing what I originally submitted. And so I was

just thinking like, oh my gosh, I am horrible at this job. I have no idea what I'm doing, but it's just a curve. And then like Nicole said, there are people who have different formats. There are some partners who want to be more particular and more argumentative. And so just adjusting to that is hard. But definitely that first red comments, comment bubbles were a shock.

Chandra Shih:

That is a very common experience that both of you felt, I'm sure Nicole would agree with me, we've all been there. I think you try to tell summer associates or junior associates that we are not expecting you to come into this job knowing how to do it. If we did, law school would've been a fundamentally different experience. And so we expect it to be 100% on the job training, but the things that you can leverage to help set you apart are those sort of soft skills that we've been talking about, being proactive, keeping good lists, making sure you're trying to do all of the things that have nothing to do with being a lawyer, but make you somebody who's good at being organized and good at being proactive and good at wanting to learn. Those are all of the things that we care so much about in the beginning.

And everyone at a law firm is invested in helping teach you the rest because we want to make you really good technical practicing attorneys, but you can't use Google to find the answer to 90% of the questions that are asked here. And if you could, none of us would have jobs. And so I think having that moment of realization, but also taking it to heart when people tell it to you, it's really hard to do, but it's so important because if you get focused on all the things you don't know, you will not be long for this career. One of the things I enjoy about it is the fact that I get to learn something new almost every day, and you have to just get over that fear of not knowing because it's part of what actually becomes enjoyable about this job.

Nicole Fulfree:

And Amanda, I think everyone's had that feeling when you look at it and you're like, oh my God, I must have no idea what I'm doing. But that actually is the case because when you're a first, second year, no one really expects you to have any idea what you're doing substantively. To some extent, obviously yes, but the lawyers that you're working with have so many more years of experience and on a lot of deals, no, you're not on every single phone call, you're not on the client phone calls. And so you don't have the additional context that's needed to do a lot of the work that's necessary for a pleading like a motion. And so it's natural to have a lot of comments from senior attorneys on those types of things. And to know that that's normal is very validating, and it's an experience that every junior associate has. It's just part of growing up as a lawyer.

Chandra Shih:

What I was going to say is don't just take the markup and look at it and go, this is exactly how I need to do it next time. Ask the most important question there is, which is, why did you make these changes? Can you help me understand when this might be applicable? Because you might have five clients ask you the same question, or you might have five clients that have the exact same thing that needs to be done, but the outcome and the answer might be different in each case because of circumstances related to it or nuance that you either may not know or you may not have learned about yet. And it's really important to ask the question, why. Because we are not just sort of a forms factory where we complete things and turn them in. It's we

have to be very thoughtful and diligent and asking why just helps you step into that next level so much sooner.

Nicole Fulfree: And so I think this conversation lends itself about the next question, which is were there any hard lessons that you've learned in your respective careers that you wouldn't mind sharing with our audience?

Amanda Cipriano: I think the hardest lesson for me is that I've had situations where I was just so busy that my work product suffered. And as a lot of us are perfectionists, especially women and especially women attorneys, I think producing something that subpar your standard is really frustrating. And so I've had a few situations where I just felt overwhelmed. I didn't know what I was doing, I didn't know how to get in control of my schedule to the point where the work I was giving to other people just wasn't reflecting my best. And that was kind of a hard lesson because someone noticed and they noticed the extent that they checked in on me to see how I was doing, but the only reason they did that was 'cause they noticed my work product was slipping.

And so it was just nice that someone cared about how I was doing and my wellbeing, but it was also kind of a reality check to me that you can't say yes to everything. And as we discussed before, there's ways to not, but I think it was kind of hard having those communications and figuring out how to adjust myself and knowing that I needed help, I needed assistance and needed ways to work towards that.

Megan Williams: Yeah. To be very honest, sometimes I feel like I'm my own worst enemy, especially when it comes to the longevity of putting in work and continuing to improve and continuing to flex the muscle of these skills that we talk about every day. I mean, like Amanda said, I mean to be a perfectionist and to come straight from law school and undergrad prior to that and to always kind of be in a school environment and feel like you've got the school environment down and then to work your first corporate job. And there's a lot of adjustments I think as we've talked throughout this conversation about, and it's very easy to just honestly to bully yourself and to really be like, I'm not good at this. And then in turn, I felt like I wasn't necessarily seizing opportunities as well as I could have, and over time I wasn't where I necessarily wanted to be at that parameter in my career.

And so realizing that was really helpful and realizing that a lot of it was how I spoke to myself about my work and how I spoke to myself about my stamina and my goals and my organization was a lot of the problem, not necessarily those skills in and of themselves. And so kind of learned it through going through that and realizing to be kind to yourself in a profession like this is very important because you are here to learn and you're here to grow. And so if you are hindering that on your own end, people can only come to the table with so much to kind of foster your environment.

So I think to the extent you can catch yourself in the moment, shame spiraling, for lack of a better word, to really just say, stop. Everything's going to be okay. Pretty much all mistakes are solvable, especially if you catch them in time and communicate them and keep talking to people, keep investing in yourself and you'll see those dividends returned.

Nicole Fulfree: Yeah, I am very familiar with that spiral, and I can think of a time when I've found something that I've thought that I made a big mistake on, and I, especially in the hybrid work environment, it's really easy to spiral out of control. I'm like, oh my gosh, what did I do? This is a huge mistake, but when I found throughout my career is that it's always better to raise the mistake as quickly as you find it as possible. Nine times out of 10, the partner that you're working with is going to be way happier that you brought it to their attention sooner rather than later, and that they'll either say, in my experience, most times it's been, oh, that's okay, I addressed that with opposing side already, or it's not an issue. And so instead of me sitting there for three hours with anxiety about all the potential bad outcomes from this potential mistake, raise it with someone that you can talk through it with and you'll be much better off for it.

Megan Williams: Because in the long run that, those feelings of shame and freaking out, it's exhausting and it takes the time out of your day that you could just be doing your job. And sometimes you sit back and you're like, this is so silly. I am causing my own problem here. So I think to the extent that you can have those conversations with yourself, I found them to be very helpful.

Nicole Fulfree: Who are thinking about law school or are currently in law school and applying to law firms, what's the one piece of advice that you would like to leave them with? And first, I want to toss this one to Chandra because we had our partners retreat this past weekend and she was on a panel and she raised a point that I had never articulated in my mind, but it's such a helpful tip I think for up-and-coming attorneys. And Chandra, I'm talking about the tip that you gave about the differences between law firm life and school and how being at a law firm is very different from school and what mindset you should approach law firm life with.

Chandra Shih: Yeah, absolutely. I know exactly what you're talking about because it's something that I wish I would've known about when I was law student transitioning into law firm life, but something that I have only recognized in having sort of trained and mentored a lot of junior associates who've come in now and in just observing which ones of them have the most success early in their career.

The key in my mind is really stepping out of the mindset of thinking, "I've been given an assignment. I have written down what that assignment is. I have diligently completed that assignment and I have turned that assignment in to my teacher or to the partner or to the senior associate I'm working with. And you're sort of waiting for that feedback on that one assignment and going, okay, now I'm going to move on to my next assignment."

When you work at a place like we do, it's a law firm, it's a client service industry, we are not doing homework assignments for our clients. We are actually helping them with real problems that they may have or things that they may need our help with. And so getting out of the mindset of just I'm completing a task and moving on and switching to the mindset of "I am somebody who is on this team with this client, I want to try to anticipate what their needs are, I want to try to be part of the whole picture and sort of own that relationship sooner" and think about why you're doing what you're doing

and how they might need help with other things, that helps take you into a different place, I think. And the sooner you can start to think about that at an early stage, the better you are because in doing the work, you're the person who's probably closest to whatever the task is.

You might notice things, you might have questions about things, even if you're not sure what to do with it. Having that extra conversation, trying to understand why, trying to anticipate and think about what a client might need, it makes you a better attorney, but it also allows us to give our clients better service and it makes you sort of part of the team and owning it from an earlier stage in a way that I think leads to long-term success.

And so from my perspective, that is just one of the biggest things that I would recommend that people start trying to do from an early stage.

Megan Williams: Well, I think that's really helpful advice. As far as law school and I guess even applying to law firms, I think to build on that or to maybe an avenue to kind of foster that is to ask questions, which I know is pretty standard advice and given at all stages of your life.

But I do think it's important here, and I think it's important to add, ask those questions even if you don't think they're the most eloquent questions to ask, or you don't have necessarily the right terminology because there's so much to learn both when thinking about law school, but especially also when trying to figure out where do I want to work and what kind of environment do I want to be in? You have an idea that I want to figure something out here, but I don't really know how. Just start asking the questions. People are so willing to educate you, fill in the gaps and get you on your way. And the more that you start those conversations, you'll always end it at a place where now you have the terminology to ask at a later time or to build upon that. So ask questions, but they do not need to be perfect.

Amanda Cipriano: I think the one piece of advice I'd give to listeners who are currently in law school, maybe applying to firms is that when you're looking at firms and you're talking to people at firms, I think just think about whether or not you could stand eating lunch with the people you're interviewing with. I found that sometimes my dinners with Megan are the highlight of my workday, and so I feel like when you're interviewing at firms, you should think about the environment and think about that, yes, this is a job, but the people you're working with, you're going to be spending a lot of time with. And if you don't see yourself fitting in with those people, maybe it's not the right fit for you.

Nicole Fulfree: Think also, as you are coming into a new law firm, I think one of the most important things that you can do is scope out that high performing mid-level or senior associate, either within your group or outside of your group that you feel can be trusted with the questions that you have, whether it's about your substantive work product or about firm politics, or what time should I leave or what should I wear to this event? I can't stress the importance of finding that person to ask those questions to because it'll save you a lot of strife in the long run.

Okay, so thank you for sharing some tips on what you guys wish you knew starting out, and how to set yourself up for success as a junior associate. Thanks for joining us for another episode of the Women's Initiative Network Real Talk. We'll see you next time.

Amanda Cipriano: 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, Google Podcasts, and SoundCloud. Lowenstein Sandler podcast series is 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.