



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

Episode 39:

**The Power of "Popular": Why Sponsorship is Critical
to Career Advancement and Client Development**

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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 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](https://www.lowenstein.com/podcasts), 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 Dikovics, counsel in Lowenstein's White Collar Defense Practice Group.

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

Rachel Dikovics: And we have a new voice on the podcast today. Alessandra, can you introduce yourself?

Alessandra Moore: Thank you so much for having me. I'm a big fan of the podcast. My name is Alessandra Moore. I'm in my fourth year of practice and I am also in the firm's White Collar Defense Group.

Rachel Dikovics: Welcome, Alessandra.

Alessandra Moore: Thank you.

Rachel Dikovics: So today we're talking about the importance of sponsorship. We'll talk about what that means to us in career advancement and client development. The idea for this episode actually came to me while watching the new-ish Wicked movie. If you've seen the musical or the movie, you'll recall the scene in which our heroines are at a party and Elphaba starts to dance and is initially ostracized by the other attendees. But Galinda, not yet Glinda at that point, the resident popular girl, joins

her on the dance floor, indicates to everyone that she accepts Elphaba and the impact is immediate. She's accepted, at least temporarily. Then they launch into the song Popular, which is funny and catchy, but also pretty insightful in a few ways. It all got me thinking about the power of the "popular girls" or boys when it comes to career advancement.

I think it's true that for many of us there have been times, particularly early in our careers, when it was really critical to have the backing of somebody who was already accepted, respected, or powerful. In other words, someone popular. And so, I want to start our conversation by talking a little bit about the difference between mentorship and sponsorship because I think both those things are important when discussing this concept.

So, to kick it off, to me, the difference between mentorship and sponsorship is that mentorship is generally private. It can be conversations between a mentor and mentee over a long period of time, whereas sponsorship I see as being public as a sponsor, putting their name out in the room when that person's not there, giving them opportunities, backing them in something that they want to do. What do you guys think about the difference between them?

Alessandra Moore: I'd even take it a step further than that, and I think Dr. Phil and Oprah's relationship could be an interesting example here. So, Dr. Phil and Oprah have known each other for 40 years. And before Dr. Phil was Dr. Phil, Oprah was his mentor. And in private, Oprah would say, "You should join this group, you should meet this person." But never publicly backed Dr. Phil until she became his sponsor by bringing him on her show in a regular capacity and then becoming an executive producer of his show and investing in it. So, I think that there's, like you said, Rachel, what's done in private is mentorship, whereas what's done publicly is sponsorship.

Megan Monson: Yeah, I think that's a really great point and great example. And I think it's important to also emphasize that you will throughout your career have mentors and sponsors. Sometimes they will be the same person, sometimes they will not be, but they do serve very vital roles throughout your career journey. And I couldn't agree more with what the both of you said. I think the mentorship is those conversations and relationships you have behind closed doors, the people who encourage you to take on these opportunities, and the sponsors are the ones who really can make it happen.

Rachel Dikovics: I totally agree with you that sometimes it's the same person and sometimes they're different people and each person and each role is really important in career development.

So, can you each share a time in your career when someone respected has vouched for you in some way and how it made a difference?

Megan Monson: I'll start with that. So, I can think of two examples and they both fall under the category of what you were suggesting, Rachel, about having people who are in the room. The first was in my first legal job, having one of the directors I worked with in the room helped me get an additional raise that she thought I was entitled to because I was a star performer. And without her in that room making that suggestion, I don't think that would've happened.

Alessandra Moore: Can I ask you a question about that?

Megan Monson: Yeah.

Alessandra Moore: So, did you ask her to be your sponsor or did this come about naturally?

Megan Monson: Yeah, so that's a great question. So, it started out I think similarly as what we were talking about. She started out as my mentor, but then because she was somebody who was in those rooms, kind of took it on herself to be my sponsor, especially when she knew that it was something I deserved, and I wasn't particularly happy.

Alessandra Moore: Got it. Okay.

Megan Monson: And so, I think that was an important piece in that particular situation because it helped me stay where I was longer.

Alessandra Moore: Yeah.

Megan Monson: And I'll say another example. Similarly started out with a mentorship relationship that transitioned into sponsorship was again making partner. So again, a big pivotal career moment. And when I was up for partner, I think having somebody in that room who is strongly advocating for me may have helped move the needle for me to make a partner during my first window.

Alessandra Moore: I'm sure it did.

Megan Monson: And so, I think it's just really critical that you build those relationships, you prove yourself career-wise, but having somebody who will speak on your

behalf can always be a very helpful component and helpful to have just somebody advocating when you can't be there yourself.

Rachel Dikovics: There's also kind of a chicken and egg component I think to the story you just shared. So, when we were talking before this episode, Alessandra mentioned the concept of being sponsorship ready, which I think is a great concept and one we definitely want to talk about. But I think in Megan's story about making partner, you're kind of linking the fact that your sponsor was in the room to help put your name forward. But there's I think the flip side of that is because of that person's mentorship and sponsorship, you were partnership ready.

Megan Monson: That's a very good point, Rachel. Yeah.

Rachel Dikovics: And because they helped to kind of craft who you were in your career and make you ready to take on that role when it was available to you. And so, I think that's really helpful too.

Alessandra Moore: I'm the most junior person here, and so my examples are not quite as dramatic, we'll say, as making partner, but I think for more junior folks, we could see sponsorship in just being added to cases or just being given opportunities that we might necessarily not be given if we weren't "sponsorship ready" or if we hadn't proven ourselves.

So, I can think of one. I got randomly assigned to a partner case here and I did a good job, and he said, "Come work for me again. Come work on this case." Worked on that case, did a good job. And now I'm on almost every case with this one partner who has given me opportunities that people in my class here don't necessarily get all because I proved myself and he trusted me, and I did a good job, and we worked well together.

Megan Monson: Yeah. And I actually really like that example because you're right, sponsorship is not just at these pivotal career moments. It's throughout your career journey and it's going to look differently at each stage. And that is a way that you're sponsoring people publicly because you're giving them more work, you're taking them onto your cases, and so you don't necessarily have to be in those rooms, but they're still advocating for your career growth by giving you opportunities.

Alessandra Moore: Yeah. Especially opportunities that perhaps I wouldn't get as a third or a fourth-year associate. I think opportunities that he knows that he can push me a little bit because he knows I'm up for the challenge, and I just think that's so important, the trust of someone to know, "Hey, I know you've never taken a deposition before, but you can do this and have at it." I think that's sponsorship too.

Rachel Dikovics: It absolutely is. Two things come to mind for me, and one is a sort of pivotal career moment and one is a longer-term sponsorship. So, I've actually thought back to getting my summer associate position at this firm back decades ago, no, but a while ago. This firm wasn't really recruiting from my law school. I really wanted to go here, and I reached out to a mentor of mine and asked her, "Do you know anybody there to help open the door for me?" And she did know somebody there who could open the door and reached out and said, "I want you to at least give her an interview." And here I am. And that was key for me. I probably would not otherwise be here apart from that person doing one, to her, little thing to help me get in the door that completely changed the course of my career.

The other thing that comes to mind for me is a longer-term thing. One of the partners in my group has been really great over the years, really since I was a junior associate about staffing me on his cases but also taking the time to help me develop my own clients. And every time I go to him with a potential client, whether we end up working with them or not, he's always willing to invest the time to talk to me about the client, talk to me about strategy, do the pitch with me, and really help me figure out what kind of business I can sign and then also how to work with those clients to keep them happy and keep them engaged with the firm long term.

And so that's the same kind of thing that I thought about with Megan being sort of partnership ready is somebody investing the time to give you those sorts of skills. Then when you're up for a position like that, it's a lot easier for that person, who probably is going to be in that room, to say, "I've been doing this kind of work with her for X years and she's ready to do this and here's how I know this person can do this."

So, I think there are these kind of pivotal moments, but just as important is the long-term things that lead to somebody being willing to speak up for you in those pivotal moments.

Alessandra Moore: Rachel, I want to go back to that first thing that you talked about, someone making a call here. And you said that you've reached out and you said, "Hey, I really want to work at Lowenstein. Do you know anybody there? Can you help me?" I find, and I don't know if this is a woman thing or a me thing, I find that making that initial call is so hard. And I have a brother who's looking for a job right now and he is calling everybody. He has no qualms about asking for favors, and he's just calling everybody and their mother asking for help. Did you feel any sense of like, "Oh, I don't want to bother, I don't want to impose, I don't want to make this person do something they're not comfortable doing, or were you my brother who said, "I'll call anybody"?"

Rachel Dikovics: So as a person, I am very much an “I don't want to bother somebody.” In this instance, thankfully, the person I was asking is not like that at all and is happy to bother anybody anytime. And she actually was kind of all over me about what I was doing.

Alessandra Moore: Interesting. Okay.

Rachel Dikovics: And so, I said, “Well, this is what I want to do,” sent in an application, I don't know, I probably sent in an application at that point, and I said, “This is what I want to do.” And she said, “Great, I'm going to call them.” And I said, “Okay.”

Megan Monson: But you know what? I think I feel very similarly to the way that you both do, and I think sometimes that may make us seek out mentors or sponsors who are the opposite of us to help us get a little bit outside of our comfort zone and kind of embrace some of that uncomfortableness. Because I think the more you're progressing in your career journey, I think you will have more of those times where you kind of need to push yourself into those uncomfortable moments. So having somebody who is okay doing it and you see them doing it and it's successful.

Alessandra Moore: And maybe it's a lesson for us too as sponsors. Perhaps sometimes people are not comfortable making that big ask of, “Can you call Lowenstein for me? I really want to work there.” Someone expresses interest to me about Lowenstein, “I think it's a great firm. I would love to work there.” Rather than them asking, can you call for me, I proactively being like your friend who calls say, “Let me make a call. Let me see what I can do.” Just going that extra step for people who perhaps are not quite as comfortable yet.

Rachel Dikovics: But I think that also feeds back into your idea of being sponsorship ready. Right?

Alessandra Moore: Right.

Rachel Dikovics: Going back to Wicked for a minute. The song Popular tells us it's not about aptitude, it's the way you're viewed. And so, I love that quote. I think in many contexts that's very true. Do we think it's true in this context? And what you said AI, that made me think of this is you're not going to be willing to make that kind of call for everybody.

Alessandra Moore: No, absolutely not.

Rachel Dikovics: You have to have confidence in that person and confident that they are not going to reflect badly on you because maybe initially, it's about the way you're viewed, but if the person being vouched for ultimately doesn't have the goods, they lose credibility, the person who recommended them loses credibility, you lose some of that social gravity that helped you put them in that position in the first place. So, what do we think about that? At what point do you have to really actually show up?

Megan Monson: Yeah, so I mean, I think how Alessandra framed it earlier is being sponsorship ready is pretty accurate and on point. I mean, somebody's not going to go the extra mile for you, typically, unless they know that you are going to back it up. Because the points that you made, Rachel, somebody only has so much political clout that they want to expend, and so if somebody's going to go to bat for you, whether it's in a large or small way, they want to make sure that you've proven yourself to be worth it. And so, I think the way you start to do that is doing a good job professionally, being responsive, doing a good job with your work, doing all of those other things that you're expected to do at your level and beyond starts to show, "Okay, substantively I'm there. I have the personality to do this." And all of those things make it a lot easier for someone to then when those situations arise, give you more work or make that call on your behalf because they know you're going to do well regardless of wherever you go, whatever you do.

Alessandra Moore: In a previous job, before I went to law school, I worked with two people who were junior to me, and I had given an assignment to both of them and I said, "Hey guys, here's the assignment, divide it up as you will." And they sent me something back. And one was just the bare minimum, one was exactly what I asked, nothing more. The other one took it a step further. The other one tried to understand what I was asking for and said, "It might be helpful if we look into X, Y, and Z. And I took it this route just in case." And I think real talk, practical tip, if you are asked to do something as a more junior person, try to take it the extra mile or try to do something just a little bit more. Volunteer for things, ask for opportunities, prove yourself. We've all said being sponsorship ready is just proving yourself. If there's something that needs to be done on a Saturday, be the one to do it.

Megan Monson: Yeah, no, I mean, and I couldn't agree more. And for the people that do that, those are the ones that then I want to develop those relationships.

Alessandra Moore: We remember.

Megan Monson: Yeah, you remember.

Alessandra Moore: Yeah.

Megan Monson: I want to actively mentor and help them succeed in their career. And so I take the time to figure out what are good opportunities for them and if there's opportunities to sponsor them by getting them on panels or speaking engagements or in front of clients. All of those things you don't get if you're not proving yourself first.

Alessandra Moore: And it's not that the other kid who did this assignment did anything wrong, he just did the bare minimum and the other person working, she went so above and beyond and just took it a step further that I feel so much more likely to want to advance her and to help her than someone who gave me something that was just the bare minimum.

Rachel Dikovics: Yeah. And I think that feeds into building relationships that are long term and also building a sense of loyalty, which I think is really important to people wanting to take proactive steps to sponsor you. Because when you proactively take something off their plate or give them more than they asked for or do something else to say, "I was thinking about what you need, and so I did this," that makes that person feel like I want to keep working with them, they make my life easier, not I have to redo this, or it was the bare minimum really. Now that I see something else, I realize actually I do need that. And I think going the extra mile for people as a junior associate really helps to build those relationships, make people keep coming back to you for work.

And one thing I want to talk about is then as you become more senior, how does sponsorship remain important to client development, for example?

Alessandra Moore: Something that I think we should talk about and something that I don't think is spoken about enough is that sponsors should be talking to each other and talking about what it is that we are doing for the people that we are helping.

I think having a community, and I think our firm does a great job, but having a community of other sponsors that we could talk to, "Hey, there's this great deposition prep program that I encouraged one of my mentees or sponsors to go to, and it was a huge success and she benefited tremendously from it." The only way we know about those things is if we talk to each other. And so I think having open communication among more senior people is an important first step just to know... There's no manual on this, right? Just to know what the heck I'm supposed to be doing.

Megan Monson: Yeah. And I think all of that then also ties into the business development aspect because you're learning from different people's career styles. You're learning what's been successful for different people. And so, you have a lot more tools in your toolkit to share with those people that you're mentoring and sponsoring.

Rachel Dikovics: And also I think being able to say to a potential client of your own, "Here's this person who is super credentialed and really experienced and somebody who's respected in the legal community, and by the way they vouch for me and think you should work for me and they're available to me to answer questions," is incredibly valuable.

One of the great things about working at a big firm is that you have a lot of people at your disposal who can help you. Even if it's your client, that doesn't mean that other people are not going to be giving you input on what to do. In fact, really it should be the opposite in most cases. And I think that's something that can really be leveraged, but you need that person to be willing to be on the call with you, be in the room with you, be actively vouching for you, even if it's just going somewhere with you to give you extra credibility. I think that's really important, especially when you're in that sort of in-between where especially if you're not yet a partner or you're a more junior partner and you're trying to build up your book of business, you need people who are more established to tell other people that you're trustworthy and you're somebody that they can use.

Alessandra Moore: And I think to even take that a step further, our law firm has so many resources, and we are so lucky to have the experts in basically every field, but there will be people listening to this who maybe work at really small firms. And I think it's so important to join a women's group or a state bar association to, kind of, build a network of people who you could call to bounce an idea off of.

I had a complex issue I was working on and I was confused, and I remember meeting somebody at a New Jersey women's lawyer event who did this exact thing. I was like, "Maybe I'll just text her." So, I texted her, we hopped on a call, she couldn't have been... She's like, "You have to look at this treatise, look here." And she just pointed me in the right direction, and it was so unbelievably helpful. So even if people don't have a subject matter expert next door to them or in their firm, there are ways you can kind of cultivate that beyond these four walls.

Rachel Dikovics: And doing something like that is also a great networking activity for you, right?

Alessandra Moore: Yes. Yeah. It is. Exactly.

Rachel Dikovics: Because the person you're reaching out to is complimented that you ask them and it reminds them that you exist and maybe you hear from them again.

And one other thing I wanted to talk about is how these things change how sponsorship changes when we're looking at internal versus external opportunities. And Alessandra, I think you mentioned this earlier, internal sponsorship opportunities often come up a lot earlier in our careers than these, kind of, external client pitch opportunities, things like that. So, for example, vouching for a junior associate who you want to staff on an interesting matter, suggesting to a senior partner, as Alessandra mentioned, that that junior person is competent enough to do more. What are some ways that you've each acted as a sponsor for a woman junior to you, and maybe it's somebody you also mentored?

Megan Monson: Yeah, so I think certainly in those two examples that you gave, Rachel, I mean, I'm regularly having more junior women handle calls without me or at least lead the calls that I'm on if they've proven themselves and I think that they're comfortable. I'll certainly ask them first. But I like to give them those opportunities to have face time with the clients. Again, participating in panels or CLEs, going to client meetings. It could be internally facing, such as interfacing with other partners or associates that are more senior at the firm, or externally facing, emails to clients, client meetings, client calls. But I try to look for opportunities in everything that I'm working on with them to be the one that's being viewed externally as the person who's doing the work, especially if they've proven themselves and they deserve it. And it could be as easy as they're the ones sending the emails. But they're the ones doing the work, and so you want to make sure that people know their name and know what they're doing.

Alessandra Moore: You mentioned it, Megan, and I think it's important. We all end up on these email strings with 50 people. I think it's as simple as giving a shout-out there. "Hey, Rachel did an amazing job on this brief. Thank you so much for all of your hard work." I think, like you said, it's just these little shout-outs and it goes such a long way. It builds loyalty too. Not only are we advancing these more junior women, but we're also building a trust and a relationship between us. And now she'll want to work even harder for me to make sure that she's getting more opportunities because it feels good to get called out. Right?

Megan Monson: Well, and I think that actually makes me think of, there are plenty of times where I'm working just on a transaction, for example, with a junior attorney in my practice group, and once the deal closed, I'll send an email to the partner, the head of our practice group, CC'ing that attorney and

saying like, "XYZ did a great job on this matter," because not everybody else is seeing what they're doing and I want to make sure the right people know.

Alessandra Moore: And how hard is that? How long did that take you?

Megan Monson: Exactly. It took me 30 seconds if that.

Alessandra Moore: Yeah.

Rachel Dikovics: It makes a big difference. And it's also beneficial to the person sending the email.

Alessandra Moore: Oh, yeah.

Rachel Dikovics: Because it shows the person that you're sending it to that you're a good leader, that you're somebody who's looking out for people who are junior to you trying to highlight what they're doing. I think the shout-out on an email thing is so easy and so underrated.

Actually, a great example. Alessandra was working on a case with me over the summer and was busting her butt on this case, late night emails, constantly every day doing stuff for this case. And I would try to remember to send an email back in response to her just says, "Thanks, Alessandra, you're doing great work on this," because a lot of people don't do that, and I think it's really important to say, "You're doing a really good job," and to highlight it to the people who are senior to both of us on the email and say, "She's doing good work." Be like, "Keep giving her work."

And I think it also helps create a sort of pay-it-forward mentality, which I think is something that is important to all of us, is important to a lot of people in WIN by setting an example of how you behave as a sponsor, how you behave to your mentees. I think it really helps to create a more positive workplace culture in the long term, because the more people you are nice to, the more people are going to be nice to other people as well.

Alessandra Moore: And Rachel sending that email over the summer or those emails when I was working really hard and doing my absolute best client service and just really killing myself, made me want to work even harder. It was like, "Oh, I'm getting positive reinforcement. This is great. People are knowing my name. I want to work even harder now." And it made me feel so important. Because I think sometimes when we're junior, we're not always client-facing. We're not always going to be the ones to get to go to the meetings. But just getting your name out there is so critical, and it made such a difference for me that I'm pulling these late nights, but it made it

worth it, like I'm a part of the team too. Everybody wants to feel a part of something.

Rachel Dikovics: And knowing that even if you're doing work that's not client-facing at that time or whatever, knowing that your work is valued and that it's not just like, "Okay, here's another email," that somebody is reading it and appreciating the hours that you put in is really critical, I think, to making people feel appreciated and helping them develop long term.

Megan Monson: Yeah, and that's a very easy way to be a mentor or sponsor to somebody that's not going to be a large time commitment, right? Sometimes when people are thinking of, "Oh, am I going to be mentoring somebody? I'm going to have to be sitting down with them having these long meetings." It doesn't have to always be that. You can certainly have that, but it can be just these little things that you can do that can make a huge difference.

Rachel Dikovics: Thanks for joining us for another episode of the Women's Initiative Network Real Talk. We hoped you enjoyed our conversation, and we'll see you next time.

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