



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

**Episode 4 -
But I Get Up Again: Personal and Professional Resiliency – Part 1**

By [Megan Monson](#), [Rachel Moseson Dikovics](#), [Amanda Cipriano](#)
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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](https://www.lowenstein.com/podcasts), or find us on iTunes, Spotify, Pandora, Google Podcasts, and SoundCloud. Now let's take a listen.

Megan Monson: Welcome back to the Women's Initiative Network: Real Talk. I'm one of your hosts, Megan Monson Partner in Lowenstein Sandler's Employee Benefits and Executive Compensation practice group.

Rachel Dikovics: I'm one of your other co-hosts, Rachel Dikovics, Associate in Lowenstein's White Collar Criminal Defense practice group. We also have a guest with us today, I'll let her introduce herself.

Amanda Cipriano: Hi everyone, my name is Amanda Cipriano. I am an Associate in Lowenstein's Litigation practice group.

Megan Monson: Thanks so much, Amanda, for joining us for the next two episodes of the Women's Initiative Network: Real Talk, we're going to focus on a topic that's near and dear to our hearts, personal and professional resiliency. Back in 2019, which now given the state of the world seems, like a long time ago, we hosted a program focusing on resiliency and overcoming both professional and personal obstacles. Studies have shown that lawyers and other professionals exhibit significantly higher levels of stress than any other category of work.

So it's really important for us to be able to bounce back from moments of stress and figure out how to efficiently and effectively cope with longer periods of stress. During our program, we started off by polling attendees on "what is the top habit exhibited by resilient individuals, both on a personal and professional level?" We also asked, "what is the top unhealthy habit that inhibits resiliency and holds us back?" And the last question we asked the group was "what is the top habit that prevents us from recognizing that our missteps can inform our future successes?"

Rachel Dikovics: After that program, we created a list of 10 habits that build resiliency. We've since shared them with many others, and we're sharing them with you in this

two part episode of Real Talk. Those 10 habits include, avoid comparing yourself to others, ditch overuse of qualifiers, rely on each other, think positively and keep perspective, own successes and mistakes, don't lose the forest through the trees, responding to a misstep is as important as making it, project confidence not apology, that's my personal favorite, strive for positivity in your environment and make guilt free time for yourself. Let break down each of these habits and discuss how we try to incorporate them into our daily lives.

Amanda Cipriano: First habit you mentioned on your list, avoid comparing yourself to others. What does that entail for someone?

Megan Monson: So in general, I think what most of us tend to do is comparing ourselves to others or more accurately our perception of others. And while it can be really tempting, things aren't always as they seem, and it could lead to an unrealistic expectation and high bar for yourself. While it's important to set high expectations for yourself, you really should focus on setting and achieving your own goals in a way that works for you instead of what you perceive to work for others, as your path to success, isn't necessarily going to be the same path that's taken by others.

Amanda Cipriano: Now, how can you go about doing that to avoid these kinds of unhealthy comparisons?

Rachel Dikovics: I think it's important to remember that the grass is always greener on the other side, even in the professional context. Like Megan said, comparing yourself to others, often sets an unrealistic bar for you. Because other people may be dealing with different factors in their personal and professional lives than you are, which either enable them to do something that you haven't done yet or enable them to work different hours than you or be at the office different hours than you would.

That's less of a problem today in our hybrid environment. But I remember when I was a more junior attorney, I was very conscious of who was in the office before or after me. But often what really matters is whether you're getting your work done. It doesn't matter so much who is staying at the office the longest. And you really don't always know what is going on with other people. The person who's at the office the longest, maybe in the context of lawyers, billing significantly fewer hours than you. So comparing yourself when you don't have the full story ends up really just handicapping you at the end of the day.

Megan Monson: Yeah. I mean, everything Rachel says is exactly spot on. I mean, you don't know what everyone else's situation is. You don't know even if you see other people in the office, what their quality of work is. So it's really not a good gauge and metric to measure yourself and try to account for yourself against what you see somebody else doing. Because everyone's career path is different and everyone's interaction with colleagues, clients superiors is going to differ.

Amanda Cipriano: I think that's a great point. The second habit you list is ditch over use of qualifiers. Now what exactly is a qualifier?

Rachel Dikovics: This is one of my favorite tips from our list, because I think that actually, I just used a qualifier right now and I'll explain why. Qualifiers are used extremely frequently in casual conversation, in written communications. And in my experience, they're used much more frequently by women. Not only women attorneys, but in every career path and in your personal life as well. So a qualifier is any word or phrase that takes away from the credibility or authority of the statement that either follows it or came before it.

So some examples of qualifiers following a statement might be, "Does that make sense?" Or the rhetorical, "Right?" And these are things that we tend to use a lot. And I know that I definitely struggle with some of these as well. But these kinds of phrases are generally unnecessary if you're communicating your thoughts clearly. And words or phrases such as "Kind of" or "Like" where you don't really need to use that word in the sentence that you are communicating, convey a lack of confidence.

And so do, this is what I really struggle with, I think, I believe, as far as I know. Things like that. Now there are some context where that's appropriate because you need to hedge what you're saying, but there are often a lot of context where at least for me, I'm certain of whatever I saying after that and I'm just trying to soften the delivery.

Sometimes you may need to do that, but a lot of times you don't. And removing phrases like that can help you communicate your knowledge and authority on particular information better. It's also important to remember that as attorneys, most legal dilemmas don't come with a crystal ball. We often don't know that our answer is 100% correct. Attorneys are very well known for saying it depends because it does always depend. So a lot of times we do have to hedge our answers. And sometimes that's okay, but where it's not necessary, it's helpful to eliminate.

Amanda Cipriano: How do you get over the feeling of feeling as if you're coming off as rude when you don't use an exclamation point or say things with the sincerity that you're saying, especially as a younger attorney where the majority of people you're communicating with are more senior to you?

Megan Monson: So that's definitely something that I struggled with at a more junior level, even to an extent now. But I find that by removing the qualifiers, to Rachel's point, you're projecting more confidence. And so listening to others on conference calls, my male colleagues are not typically using those same qualifiers that I would feel so comfortably throwing in there.

And I would start to notice that they kind of command more presence in those conversations. And so I think the point of thinking about whether it's coming off rude or potential like condescending is just an internal perception. Because for women, I think it's more difficult to come off as confident and strong. But as long as you are comfortable with the material that you're talking about, or whatever you're saying, go for it. You don't need those qualifiers because that does take away from your credibility.

Rachel Dikovics: That said, there may be some situations where you feel like its more important to provider softer delivery than it is to necessarily come off as being

extremely confident in what you're saying, even if you are. And that's something you have to kind of read situationally. And it depends, is what I'm trying to say. And later we'll talk a little bit about tips for avoiding using language like this and some phrases that are helpful that we can use instead of qualifiers.

Amanda Cipriano: Now, your third topic is relying on each other. This sounds pretty straightforward, but how does this play out in practice?

Megan Monson: So before practicing law, I never really thought about it as a team game, but in effect it is. And a lot of what you do is going to be really team based. And so I think it's really important, not only in developing your relationships and learning from others, but also if you're confronting a misstep or a mistake, talk to somebody else, whether it's a trusted colleague or friend and use them as a sounding board.

Because chances are, they've been in either a similar situation or another situation and can relate. And they'll also help operate as a sounding board for you and put things into a bit better perspective. Because it's always easy to be self-deprecating and really hard on yourself, but being able to share how you're feeling and work through it with another person's perspective can help you move beyond it and also finding the value in whatever the situation was.

Amanda Cipriano: And related to this one, another habit is thinking positively and keeping perspective. So can you talk a little bit about that, how it ties into maybe relying on each other?

Rachel Dikovics: Yeah, Absolutely. So when you're facing a mistake or a misstep that you've made, it's really helpful to take stock of your most successful accomplishments and the challenges that you've faced in the past. By doing that, you can contextualize the mistake or misstep within the entire spectrum of your career and your accomplishments and challenges, and realize that sometimes making a mistake will teach you an important lesson that will help you to grow and move forward.

Positive thinking also helps you project confidence just as we were talking about to clients, to adversaries, to your peers and to the people that you report to at work, and also helps you see your own value and the importance of investing yourself and your skillset. Something that can really help is tapping into both your internal and external networks when you're trying to get perspective on something that has happened to you, or because of you, depending on the situation.

And maybe you made a mistake and you feel like you're getting fired tomorrow and you tell your mentor about it and they say, "That's really not a big deal. Everybody does that. Nobody's really going to care in the end." And I think especially for junior attorneys, every mistake feels like the end of the world. And the vast majority of the time, it's not. Most things are fixable in the legal profession. And so it really helps to utilize your network of mentors and peers to help you get through those tough moments.

Amanda Cipriano: And so I know women tend to struggle with this next habit, especially myself, especially as a young attorney. And I feel like talking to a lot of the other attorneys at Lowenstein, it's a very common phenomenon that we all struggle with, but own successes and your mistakes. So can you talk a little bit about that? How do you own your successes, especially in this world where it's hard to celebrate yourself?

Megan Monson: Yeah, that's a great point. So I'll say one point to start off in terms of owning successes. And this ties back into what Rachel was talking about, is when I've done a really good job on something and whether it's come from a partner I work with or from a client, if I receive email with good feedback, I put that in a folder and kind of look to that when I need kind of a reminder, a pat on the back of a job well done. So in those moments of where you have those missteps, there's something to refer to that, no, I actually do know what I'm doing.

And I think that tends to help just from a confidence building perspective. In general, for owning successes and mistakes, I think it's important to focus on the positive contributions you've made to something. As women, there's been a number of times where myself included, it's easy to minimize your positive contributions. So working on a large deal and someone's, "Oh, great job." My response initially may have been, "Oh, I only helped on this one little piece of it. It really wasn't a big deal."

When in effect I saved the client a lot of money. I did a great job, but I felt uncomfortable accepting the praise. And so it's getting comfortable with owning the things that you've done well, because you've earned it. You've put in the time. Others are going to sell themselves and no one's going to sell you like you. So you really should take ownership of great accomplishments you've had. And if there are people that have given you compliments, accept those. Be gracious and appreciate it and file it away for when you have that bad day and you could refer to it.

On the flip side, if you make a mistake, I think one of the most important things you could do is own it, making sure that not only you're comfortable, you realize you screwed up and then seeing how you can utilize that as a learning experience. Because not only is that going to help you grow as a professional, but it's also going to look better for whoever you made the mistake with because you're taking that constructive criticism and turning it into a productive learning experience.

Rachel Dikovics: I also just want to add that one thing about making mistakes and one thing about accepting compliments. So mistakes first, I think that it's critical, like Megan said to be transparent when you've made a mistake and to inform whoever you may be going to, to help you correct the mistake that you made one immediately. And it can be really nerve wracking to realize that you've made a mistake, but it's worse if you know about it and say nothing and wait for somebody else to discover it.

Because then you're potentially putting other people in a bind. And it will always go over better for you to be the one to say, "I made a mistake" then for somebody else to come to you and say, "You made a mistake." And the

more you can do that, the more the other person will respect you and will not hold your mistake against you because you're taking steps to proactively remedy it. The other thing about accepting compliments, I think that, like Amanda said, a lot of women really struggle with accepting compliments.

And one of the things that has been helpful for me is to have some kind of go-to phrases that you can utilize when somebody says something nice to you, either by email or in person. Some things that I like to use are "That's really kind of you to say, I appreciate it." Leave it at that. Or "Thanks. It's great to hear." Things like that where you don't have to be, "Yeah, I did do a great job. Thanks for noticing." But you're accepting the compliment and that can be a lot more comfortable than really sort of blatantly promoting what the person has already kindly said to you.

Megan Monson: Well, and a really good point that what I've tried to do on that is because I find it's really difficult to toot your own horn and share your successes with others, I try to do that on behalf of other people I've worked with as well. So for example, if I'm working with a junior associate, who's done a really great job on a deal, I'll send an email to the partners, either in our practice group or on that deal and letting them know and copying that junior associate.

Because they may not be feeling comfortable to say, "Oh, I did a great job" and letting somebody know about something that they've done in terms of an accomplishment, or if they've gotten an article published. But if it's something that I'm aware of and I can help do that on their behalf, I think it just goes further in trying to help promote their confidence so that they will get comfortable doing that at a later point in time.

Amanda Cipriano: I think one thing I've found helpful starting out was having a good mentor that I can feel comfortable sharing my successes with. Rachel has been that mentor for me. And I do feel that letting out steam or even my mistakes when I talk to someone about that, just the judgment free zone, I find that is a very good way to balance me just so I know that this isn't the end of the world. Or when I succeed, good. I should be proud of this. I did something productive and I deserve to brag about it a little bit sometimes.

Rachel Dikovics: Thanks, Amanda. I totally agree. It's really important to have mentors who can guide you through some of those challenging moments, as well as successes. And I'm so happy to be one of those people for you. I know for myself, my mentors have been extremely important to my career development, both internal to the firm and people I know externally. They're usually the first people I want to tell when I have good news about my career.

And they're also the people I look to for support when I have news that isn't great, or I faced a challenge that I could use help getting through. So a lot of times your mentors will be the people to guide you through the steps that we're actually talking about in these two episodes. So today, we've gone through the first five tips, which were avoid comparing yourself to others, ditch overuse of qualifiers, rely on each other, think positively and keep perspective and own your successes as well as your mistakes. Thanks for listening to part one of our episode on personal and professional resiliency.

We look forward to continuing the conversation and discussing the second half of our list of 10 habits on the next episode.

Megan Monson: Thanks so much for joining us today and we hope you'll stay tuned next time.

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