



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

**Episode 24:
Taking a Step Back: Tips and Strategies for
Returning to the Workplace after a Career
Break**

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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.

Amanda Cipriano: Welcome To the Women's Initiative Network: Real Talk. My name is Amanda Cipriano and I'm an associate in Lowenstein White Collar Practice Group.

Megan Monson: I'm Megan Monson. I'm a partner in Lowenstein Sandler's Employee Benefits and Executive Compensation Practice Group.

Diana Faillace: I'm Diana Faillace. I'm a senior counsel with Lowenstein's Investment Management Group and Anti-Money Laundering team.

Amanda Cipriano: A large number of women at some point throughout their career may take a step back from the workforce for one reason or another and then decide to later resume their career journey. As a result, today we want to focus on normalizing career breaks, and talk about tips and strategies for making a smooth transition back into the workforce with confidence.

We are fortunate to be joined by Diana Faillace, who is going to share her career path, and provide some insight and tips for women returning to work after a career gap.

Megan Monson: Thank you again, Diana, for joining us today. Can you tell us a little bit about your career journey, including the decision to take a step back?

Diana Faillace: Sure. I'd really be happy to, Megan. It's a career journey that's taken actually two breaks, not one. When I graduated from law school, I went straight into a very large top 10 firm, New York practice. Very demanding, no sleep, no private time, and was fortunate enough to meet my husband. And we had no idea at the point that we were going to have children. And so we kept going with our very high profile careers and of course we had a change, and that

was the adoption of our daughter. And it was coincided by my husband being transferred overseas for his job.

So I would say my first break was unintentional, but very welcome. And so I left my job, we went overseas, and I had time to spend with my daughter. When I came back, we adopted another child, but it was seven years out of the workforce. I took a longer time out. At the time that I came back it was very difficult for women to enter the workforce again. People looked at you as if you didn't know anything anymore, you had mommy brain. There were many other comments made that I'm sure everybody's heard. "Oh, your talents are lost."

So you network among your friends, the ones who have jobs, you try to find out. Personal networking is still the best. My route back, and it was Lowenstein that gave me my route back, was as a temporary attorney. And as the person who interviewed me said, "I need an adult in the room. I need someone who is going to be able to keep the clients happy, who is going to stay organized and be okay under pressure." And I looked at the partner I was talking to and I said, "Well, you have the right person." And I explained what I had been doing for the last seven years, how I had been doing it and what I had done before. And explained that effectively raising two children was a lot harder than working at one of the top 10 firms in New York.

Megan Monson: I couldn't agree more with that sentence.

Diana Faillace: It sort of surprised him, but it was a very good back and forth relationship. But when I talked to the recruiter for the temp, I made sure they knew about, most importantly, all of my abilities, not just legal abilities. The ability just to work with other people, to stay organized, to be able to reach out and contact people. And the pressure that I could take off the people that I was working for, and to take that experience and move it forward.

Megan Monson: Yeah, I think that's a fantastic point that you just mentioned, is that you focused on not just your legal abilities and what you could do in that front, but all of the other benefits that you could bring to the table. And all the other skills that you have that would help you fill that role and be as successful as you are today.

Diana Faillace: Thank you for that. I think that the skills part, everybody sees what your legal abilities are. It was also the ability ... I had initially been doing securities and mergers and acquisitions. And then I went in-house to a very large corporation and picked up corporate secretarial and other types of skills. And it was talking to the individual that I was interviewing with to say, "My resume reflects that there are many things that I can do. If you don't think what you need me for fits that skillset, I'm an experienced attorney and it's not going to take me long to ramp up to speed."

You must sell yourself. You must be able to take all of the abilities that you have and bring it to the forefront. It's really important. I know that's what got me attention from a number of people that I was sent out to interview with.

Megan Monson: After advocating for yourself and landing a role, what helped you make the shift back into your legal career?

Diana Faillace: Well, I had a very understanding husband, which is important. There was a clear understanding that my job was important. We also had a clear understanding, and I want to be frank because this may not sound something that many people may agree with or understand, we decided whose job was more important and who was going to have to make some sacrifices if an emergency came up. Because then it becomes an argument between you and your spouse as to, "Well, it's your turn to do this." It really wasn't about turns, it was who had availability.

At that point our children were now in school, which helped tremendously, but if we were looking at coming back earlier to the States we would've gotten a nanny. We're blessed to be able to do that. But especially where you don't, and we didn't, we just made arrangements. Whose responsibility was it to pick up the children? But if there was flexibility, the other spouse needed to step in. And that flexibility is essential. We learned from what a lot of people in this situation told us, we talked to people who were beautifully frank. You have to find what works for you, and what works for me and my husband may not work for you and your spouse. You have to make a decision where the priorities are and where the give and take is.

And there's no written contract, I know we're attorneys. We did not have a written contract, there was just a very clear understanding as to what it was. And when I started at Lowenstein, the partner that I worked for was probably one of the first people who got that I needed to be on what I call the mommy track. I loved what I did, I wanted to go back to work, but I needed to work in a certain fashion. And there was a trust factor there after I proved myself, which is, if I was running out to pick up a child from soccer or whatever it was from 4:00 to 4:30, that partner knew I was back on as soon as I could and I would address the client concerns. Being able to trust the people you're working for and being able to say to them, "I'm here, but I'm monitoring on my phone. I can't be here because I have to take my child to a doctor's appointment."

There is discussion among many of my friends whether that's a good thing or a bad thing, and I need to be very frank about that as well. I trusted the people I worked for to be able to say that, and that was very unusual when I came back into the workforce. I think it's changed to today and I'm glad it has, but that theory would still be in effect. I know other women at other places who are not that comfortable and is just, "I have an appointment." And the other thing is, is I tell people nobody needs to know your business unless you feel that you are really unavailable. You have to make those decisions. These are personal to me for my specific situation.

Megan Monson: Yeah, I think that's all a really helpful perspective, Diana, and in particular about communicating with your partner or your spouse, to making sure that really everyone understands the role and who's taking on which responsibilities. Because I'm sure in your situation that helped ease the transition back and shifting from working, to being full-time stay-at-home

caregiver to your children, and then wearing both hats as caregiver, but also going back as a working professional.

I know you've touched on a number of tips for women returning back into the workforce after a career gap, whether it's to have children or for any other number of reasons, in particular about selling yourself. But are there any other, I guess, tips or suggestions that you would have to women facing those decisions of ways that could help ease their transition back?

Diana Faillace: One would be to make sure you keep in contact with the people that you like and respect and the people you worked with prior as well. I think that when I went out the first time, I didn't realize how important that was, and that was a mistake. I would call people occasionally when I was back, but the relationship by the nature of time had dropped off.

That was not the case when I took my second break, and that helped in a different way. I had called the partner that I was working for when I came back and said, "I want to go back to work, would you give me a recommendation?" And he went, "No." And I went, "What?" And he said, "You're coming back to work for us," and that's the beauty of it.

Megan Monson: Yeah, I think that really shows the importance of your network and keeping in touch with folks throughout all phases of your career, because you never know where things are going to take you.

Diana Faillace: Very important, and it really helps when you like the people you're keeping in contact with as well. I had already started to talk to other people that I was coming back to work I was going to contact a recruiter. LinkedIn now, the availability of that is good in one way. I was helping someone who was coming back into the workforce.

The problem with LinkedIn sometimes is your name is going into a computer, and if you know people at those places or ask your friends if they know people at those places, a lot of the advice that I've given to other people or try to help them with has been instrumental in their being able to come back from the workforce. I really believe those types of contacts are effectively very important.

Amanda Cipriano: When you came back to Lowenstein after your second break, was there anything particularly difficult about your transition or adjusting back to working?

Diana Faillace: Technology, it had changed a lot. I would recommend you try and keep abreast of what you can. The nature and method, my first job we had Redweld stuffed with files, and they went to a file room that was the size of a football field. And when I came back the second time, everything is in effect online. Try to stay technologically active. It didn't impact per se, it made my transition just a little bit harder, and you're already nervous because you're coming back and everybody's watching you.

So talk to other women or other people at the firm. Try to find out what they think kind of training can help, and just go with that. But make any issues you

have known to a group of people or a person that hopefully that mentor's being assigned to you, or you're making friends at the firm. And ask questions. I just kept asking questions and nobody got annoyed, everybody was great.

Megan Monson: That's always good to hear. I know they say hindsight's 20/20, but are there any things that you're thinking and reflecting on now that you wish you'd done differently in either transitioning back either after your first or second leave?

Diana Faillace: I think the biggest one was what we discussed before about ... I learned on the second one not to let your contacts lapse, that's the most important. And not to be afraid or have any fear of going for a position that's not in your specific set. When I came back, I went into a completely new area. And I went into a completely new area because in talking to both the recruiter and to the people that I interviewed with, I was able to take all of the skills from all the other specialties that I had, and say, "This can all be transitioned into this." Is it going to take me two to three months to ramp up and figure out the regulatory or whatever it is? Sure, but I can do it faster.

If you had someone else who might be more junior or who might not have any experience, your training with them is going to be more detailed. What is it that you need? If you have that time, understand that. But if you need to run and get it done, then my ramp up's going to be a lot faster because of the experience that I have. You must keep up your contacts, and you really have to be good at selling your skills. Not your legal abilities, your skills with respect to your legal abilities.

Megan Monson: Yeah, and I think that's actually a very critical point because I'm sure a lot of women, it's important to come back but come back with confidence. You took a break for whatever personal reason you did, but at the same time you are capable and are skilled in a multitude of ways. And really bringing that to the table and showcasing that with whomever your new employer is I'm sure hugely important, and it's been successful in your experience.

Diana Faillace: The phrase that I use at one point is, "I can put out the fires on your desk with minimal interference. I deal with it on a daily basis." And that was one of the triggers that I know the partner said was like, "Okay, I have somebody that I think I can rely on." You have to prove yourself. You can't just say all these things and you have to prove yourself.

And I will tell you, to work through the pit in your stomach that is going to be there for weeks, if not months, "Am I doing okay? How am I going to balance my family with my job? How am I going to get the food shopping done, or pick up the kids from soccer, and get this agreement out?" It works out, it really does. And if you have the confidence in yourself and the people who support you, you will deal with it. Life is never perfect, but it is really good when you get back in, and you're doing what you love and being with your family who you love, and it comes together.

Amanda Cipriano: When you came back to Lowenstein after your second break, did you notice any differences about firm culture from when you first started out as an attorney?

Diana Faillace: The firm culture I think was - Partner that I worked for the first time was one of the first people, one, to allow part-time work, and to understand the working mom or working parent concept. And I was free to work how I needed to work, in the office or outside of the office. That was extraordinarily unusual at the time. The partner basically said, "I don't care where you get your work done, just get it done and keep the client happy." And that's a great mantra.

And I had someone come up to me, who said, "I was trying to find you and I couldn't find you and you weren't in the office." And I said, "I'm not in the office on that day." And the individual said, "Well, you need to be in the office." And I said, "Well, that's not what the partner who hired me and who I work for said. If you have an issue with that, I need you to talk to the partner and then we need to have a discussion."

Very terrifying to say to someone when you've gotten that back in the workforce, and you are four months into the job. And the partner came back to me and said, "I took care of it. You should have told me." And I said, "I didn't want to bother you. I figured if they were going to talk to you." And he is like, "No, you are getting your work done. I don't care where you are. Thank you for getting it done how you do it. The client loves you." And that's the key, that's the balance.

When I came back the second time, part-time was in full force. Parental leave was in full force. It was wonderful to see how Lowenstein developed. And this is obviously way pre-COVID, how they developed this sense of, "We need you to do your jobs, we want you to do them very well, but we recognize you have a life, and we want your life to be important to you. And we want you to help figure out the balance." It was really fabulous to see.

Amanda Cipriano: And for any of our listeners who are either thinking of taking a break from their career or returning back to the workforce after a long break, what's the one piece of advice you would like to leave them with?

Diana Faillace: I guess it goes back to what Megan and I were speaking about earlier, please be confident in yourself. Be confident in your abilities. It will read to your interviewer if you are not. Practice with your husband, practice with somebody you trust. Do mock interviews with them. Try to make up questions and get comfortable with getting out all of your abilities in a way that matters and take constructive criticism back from them.

I used to practice with one of my girlfriends and my husband and I would have these conversations as well. Your spouse can be a really important part of this and your friends can be too. Don't walk into an interview cold, know what you want to say, and say it with confidence. And be really positive about your abilities, everybody's got them. Especially as working parents, we've all got them. It's really important to reflect that when you come back from a break.

Megan Monson: And I'll just add, Diane, I know in your situation, in particular your first break, was a little bit longer, but I think everything that you've spoken about can be applicable to whether it's a short break, such as a leave of absence for

maternity leave or to take care of an ill parent, or a longer career gap. I think all of the pieces that you mentioned in terms of returning with confidence and really selling your skills are applicable to any sort of time away from the office.

Diana Faillace:

I think as workplaces become more and more amenable to that, they understand that it is more about children. I have had a number of friends who have taken breaks for all of the reasons that you talk about. And each one of them, whether they've gone back to their previous employer, no matter what the timeline, or whether they've found a new position, that is really seems to be understood. No one's saying, "Ugh, what did she do that for?"

It is really understood that we all have obligations that we need to be able to take the time, and that's why I'm saying, be confident about it. Be secure in it. Don't let anyone make you feel insecure about it, you've done an incredible thing. And take those skills and your prior skills and bring it all together and bring it to your employer.

Amanda Cipriano:

I think that's great advice. Thank you so much for sharing some tips on relaunching your career after taking some time away from work. Thanks for joining us for another episode of The Women's Initiative Network: Real Talk. We'll see you next time.

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