



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

Episode 37:
Straying From "the Plan":
Patricia Barbieri of Daiichi Sankyo on Journey to Success
[Megan Monson](#)

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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, or find us on iTunes, Spotify, Pandora, or SoundCloud. Now let's take a listen.

Megan Monson: Welcome to the Women's Initiative Network: Real Talk. I'm Megan Monson, a partner in Lowenstein Sandler's Executive Compensation Employment and Benefits Practice Group. As part of our programming for 2025, we're launching a mini-series on Real Talk featuring successful senior women who are leaders both within their organizations and outside. For our first career highlight episode on today's episode of Real Talk, we are extremely fortunate to be joined by Patricia Barbieri, currently special advisor at Daiichi Sankyo Incorporated, a global pharmaceutical company with corporate headquarters in Japan. Pat is in transition to retirement from her role as SVP and general counsel. We've asked Pat to join us today and share some insight into her career path and to share her wisdom with our listeners. Pat, thank you again for joining us. Note, these are all personal views of Pat and are not attributable to any employer. So, Pat, let's start with the basics. Can you tell us a little bit about your initial draw into the legal profession and career as an attorney?

Patricia Barbieri: Thank you, Megan. So, before I get into that, let me start with a little bit of a career bio to put it in context. So, since this summer, as you mentioned, I've been a senior advisor for Daiichi Sankyo in the US, because I'm transitioning to retirement in April 1st of this year. I've had a series of roles since I joined Daiichi Sankyo in March of 2008. But right before the special advisor role, I was the GC and I was the head of legal and corporate affairs. Which is basically, I had all of legal, all intellectual

property, all of communications, and all the government affairs reporting to me. And I also was an officer of the company and some of the other US companies. Basically, the secretary of the company.

I graduated from Montclair State College at the time, it's now Montclair State University, with a degree in political science. I also have a master's in public administration from NYU. And then I went to law school. And I went when they still had an evening division. But I went to law school and I was admitted to the bar in 1991, and the bar of New Jersey. So, my first lawyer job, I was associated with the firm that's now known as Gibbons P.C. in Newark. And then after Gibbons, but before Daiichi, I worked Hoffmann-La Roche in New Jersey, as part of the in-house legalist staff.

So, now back to the real question, how did I gravitate to the legal profession and a career as an attorney? Well, that wasn't such a glamorous path. It turns out while I was in college, I saw my GPA taking a nosedive because I was getting Cs in some of the fun classes. I don't even remember which ones they were. But the one that comes to mind was photography because that one really hurt me. I love photography, but I got a C. So, because I always did best in the required classes, I decided to change the focus. And I was able to double minor in addition to the major in political science. So, one of the minors was paralegal studies, and that really started my interest in the law. And in fact, I started my first full-time legal job as a paralegal, and ironically in the same firm that I ultimately joined as an attorney.

Megan Monson: I think that's actually great. And I think more people could use that type of experience as working as a paralegal to really know if this is the career path that you want to proceed down before actually getting there and committing to it.

Patricia Barbieri: I mean, it's funny because I used to think and I was afraid that I would go from paralegal to attorney at the same firm, because I ended up staying at the same firm and it would be like I was a graduated paralegal. It was actually the opposite. It was almost as if I didn't get that initial glide path. Literally, I got there and it was like I had been an attorney for all the time I was there as soon as I passed the bar. So, it was very good for me because career-wise, I was able to do a lot of things I don't think I ever would've been able to do with the firm. My fear of being a graduated paralegal never came true.

Megan Monson: No, that's great. Can you talk to us a little bit about your transition from private practice to an in-house role and then into the general counsel role? Because I know there's a lot of different shifts that you've gone through.

Patricia Barbieri: So, I'll start by saying some of it wasn't planned. Honestly, it just sort of happens, especially in-house. But I was a paralegal at the firm when I was getting through law school. I became a law clerk during their summer program. And I brokered a deal for myself where I didn't have to work on the employment matters. So, I was literally walled off from the people I worked with every day. And that was very good because it gave me a lot of experience with other areas of the firm, so other legal disciplines, but also with other people that I never had day-to-day contact with. And then at the end of the summer, I got an offer to be an associate once I was done with school. And the offer was for the employment and litigation team. So, I really started out my career as an employment litigation attorney.

How did I get in-house? Well, the same way it happens to so many people. I was focusing at the time on a few clients and one of them was Roche. And I was in a meeting one day on a case. And attorney I was working with who was in-house asked me if I knew anyone, I'm going to use air quotes, "If I knew anyone interested in being an in-house attorney." And we kind of danced around a little bit, because it was a client of the firm. I had to be careful. But at the end of the day, I told them I was extremely interested and that started my path to getting that role. I was there for 13 years. And then, honestly, I left because at the end with a five-year-old at the time, the travel I was doing every week for trials with no end in sight, I just couldn't do it anymore.

It wasn't fair to my daughter, it wasn't fair to me, it wasn't fair to the company, it wasn't fair to my parents who were helping a lot at the time. So, I one day saw this role at Daiichi and I took that job. And really, it's been a whirlwind since I've been there. I progressively increased my responsibility and my accountabilities over time, starting as, again, the employment and litigation attorney doing the same as at Roche—employment, counseling, litigation of all sorts, general litigation—all the way up to the role as GC and the head of Legal and Corporate Affairs.

Megan Monson: Yeah. I mean, that's fantastic to be able to take your knowledge that you started out with, continuing it into such a successful career, and then even making it to GC where you're wearing a multitude of hats.

Patricia Barbieri: Right. When I was preparing some of my thoughts for today, I actually realized that when I started at Daiichi, I had one direct report. And when I stopped the general council role, I had over 60 direct reports. So, everything grew. It grew. The company grew, but also their responsibilities grew quite a bit.

Megan Monson: So, as you look back, what do you wish you knew in preparing for, we'll call it these transition or pivotal career moments?

Patricia Barbieri: This may sound a little bit, I'll say silly. But mostly I wish I had known that it would all work out and work out so well, because it really would've avoided a lot of useless worry and stress. There's enough stress in the job to worry about what's going to happen in the future, and what's happening, and how am I doing and all that. Just like an added stress that you really don't need. So, I always say if I tell my 23-year-old daughter, now, "You don't have to worry about that. It's going to take care of itself, right?" In the transition to the different normals, I had to be candid. I never really had the kind of transition where you had an opportunity to prepare or an opportunity to learn the job before you took it. That's just not how it happened.

A lot of the increased responsibility over the timing at Daiichi in particular, was we had a downsizing, and then some people left and I took over their work. And then the next downsizing or the next change in the structure, same thing. And then even the GC role was because my predecessor had left and I took it as acting GC. And then I was given the role a more permanent basis after that. But I took it right on as acting. So, you don't really have the time to, I'll say transition into it. I would say a lot of my personality lend itself to that. I am not afraid of learning. I'm not afraid of learning enough. So, you can't learn everything. You can't know every fact. It's just like in private practice, but maybe even more so. It just doesn't happen.

You have to be able to jump in, learn. But more importantly, you have to be able to say when you don't know the answer to something or you're not familiar with the legal background. You have to be comfortable saying, "I don't know that answer right now. I will get back to you." Not everybody's comfortable with that. A lot of people feel like it shows weakness. I just don't. I feel like you're being honest. You're being yourself. And if you don't know, you don't know, but you'll learn it and then you get back to them.

Megan Monson: Yeah. And I couldn't agree with that more. And I think that's actually a really helpful piece of advice in particular for some of the more junior individuals starting out their career, because you don't realize that that is an acceptable path. You don't know. And as long as you own it, you learn it and then get back to people, I think that actually shows a lot of strength.

Patricia Barbieri: Right. The other thing I would say, we all make mistakes. We have to learn from them, but we also have to admit to them and deal with them. I mean, I remember this one issue. I cited a case wrong in a brief I

submitted to court. I thought it was like the end of the world. I was a second year associate. And I went into the two attorneys I was working with, and we dealt with it, and we addressed it and it was fine. But your first thought is, "Oh, my God, what's going to happen? Am I going to get fired? Can I do something? Do I have to tell anybody? Should I tell anybody?" I always say, yes, you need to disclose it. You can't what I call engage with the cover-up, because that's never going to work out well for you.

And I tell that to my daughter. I tell that to my team. I tell that to my team every day. That's something that I feel also is very important, learning that you kind of learn how to deal with it, but also how to deal with it getting overly panicked and overly stressed about it. It happens. And at the company, we do have a philosophy of learning from what you last did, and learning from your mistakes, and what were the learnings from that particular product launch. What can we do better next time? We focus on that. So, for me, that really fit my personality as well.

Megan Monson: No, that's great advice. So, we know that there are events and people in our lives that can be very impactful on our career journey. Are there any major influences in your life, either people or experiences that have been particularly impactful for you? And I know it's probably very challenging to name just a couple.

Patricia Barbieri: Right. So, I'll say this, the number of people, I mean, besides my daughter, and my parents, and my family and close friends. There's been so many mentors and team members that I've worked with over the years that I'm almost afraid to name them, because I'm going to forget somebody important. But I feel like there's been two important experiences that maybe didn't shape me, as much as taught me what's important and what's not. And the first one, and the overall lesson is it all works out. It'll work out the way it was supposed to work out. I'm a big believer in that.

Megan Monson: Yeah, as am I.

Patricia Barbieri: One experience, I didn't get into any local law schools. When I was in college, I had decided I was going to apply to law schools. I didn't get into anything local, and I just could not afford to go away. And my parents couldn't afford it. I couldn't afford it. I needed to work and work full time. So, I was disappointed that I couldn't go to law school, but I decided I would fall back on that paralegal degree. And I went to work in a law firm. And that's how I started that practice. And you know what? I think about that all the time. If I hadn't gone to that firm, I wouldn't have gone to

Roche, I wouldn't have ended up at Daiichi. It really started up that path. One choice really does sometimes shape your whole life. The first lesson from that is you could have a plan, but it doesn't always work the way you planned it.

Megan Monson: But it'll all work out in the end.

Patricia Barbieri: It does work out in the end. The other thing, and I call this... it's like a little bit of imposter syndrome. It's a little bit of the negative talk that's in your head. And I have a lot of that, I'll be candid. And I've been pretty transparent about this even with my team and at the company. I've done these kinds of programs. I had applied for a promotion when I was at Roche and I didn't get it. And so, my default is always, "You're not good enough. You didn't get it because you didn't deserve it. You're not good enough." And I kept that in my head for many, many, many years. And it's still in there a little bit. Maybe it doesn't matter as much now. But what I will say is it was real and it was so strong, that negative talk.

And a lesson I learned is you've got to fight that negative... You have to listen to it, but you got to fight it because it gets in the way. It's very distracting, and it really does influence a lot of what you could do. It gets in the way. And so, how did I get over that? I mean, I even had it when I got a new job in a new company that was bigger than the one I didn't get at the old company. And then I got the next job and the next job, and I still had it in there. I always used to say, "Oh, maybe I can't do this," or "Maybe I'm not good enough to do this. What are they thinking? When did I get this?" Even as GC.

And then I realized, wait a second, not only am I doing it and I'm doing it well. I mean I had excellent reviews my whole career there. And I'm not perfect, don't get me wrong. But I could say, honestly, not only was I doing that job, I was doing things I never envisioned I would be responsible for, cases, matters. And frankly, that were so much higher level and required just more expertise than that job I didn't get. And so, that's how I kind of talked myself out of it eventually, but it took a really long time. And in retrospect, when you retire, you think about a lot of things going backwards.

But I have to say in retrospect, it was an unnecessary distraction, but it was something I had to deal with in my own head. So, that's another, I'll say lesson or maybe a piece of advice to the folks listening, that you have to be able to fight that negative talk. You can't just discount it, because sometimes it's right. But you have to be able to parse out the part that's not right and fight it.

Megan Monson: Yeah. And I love what you about using your successes to help push back on it. Because I think a lot of attorneys, I mean females in particular, I know I personally have a lot of the imposter syndrome. And I think that's really helpful advice when you have that negative talk, some of it may be true, but some of it you can point to all of these other things that you've done that you didn't expect and how you got there to help really show you deserve it.

Patricia Barbieri: There's a lot more lessons. I can talk about this probably all day, but I feel like I should stop here.

Megan Monson: So, on Real Talk, we like to keep things real and share some personal experiences and how we navigate life while being a strong, female professional. Can you talk to us a little bit about adopting your daughter and raising her while continuing to devote time to your very successful career?

Patricia Barbieri: Sure. Yeah. So, first off, my daughter, Maria, has been the best part of my whole life. I mean, candidly, she has just been the blessing of my life. She's 23 now, but I adopted her as a single mom when she was a little bit under six months old. I will say this, I don't think I could have ever adopted her if I was still at a law firm, at least the law firm at the time. Everything has changed over the last 30 years. But the law firm, at that point in time, I probably couldn't have adopted her if I hadn't gone in-house. And of course, with the help of my family, and my friends and my parents when they were both alive. My family is still a phone call away for me if something happens. And besides my daughter, I mean, my parents helped me a lot.

They also, as they got older, because they're both gone now, they both were pretty sick. And so, my dad just passed three years ago. My mom's been gone longer. But I spent a significant time while I was doing my full-time job and raising my daughter, taking care of them. And my father was on dialysis at the end for three years and we would bring him in the morning. And he lived very close by. In fact, he lived across the street from me. We spent a fair amount of time back and forth. My daughter, too. My brother, especially, because he's local to us, too. But we really took on the majority of that responsibility.

As far as my daughter, what I will say is we both have always subscribed to the work hard, play hard version of work-life balance. Because I'll be candid, when she was little, I used to pretend that I was hiding work from her. And for those of us that think that works, it does not work. Just trust me on that. When she was little, I would do conference calls at night and I would work at night when she was sleeping. But you're always on your

high BlackBerry or phone. And the day I realized it really was a total failure, actually, was that there was a time period between the time I joined Daiichi and left Roche. It was like a week, and we went away. And we're hiking at Skytop in Pennsylvania. She was five years old.

And we're walking and she's like, "Hey, mommy, don't you have any work calls? We always have work calls when you're on vacation." And I'm like, "No. In fact, I'm not working right now," I said to her. And I got a little defensive with the five-year-old. And I was like, "Not only am I not working and I don't have conference calls, I don't have any emails to check. I don't even have a BlackBerry anymore. I had to give it back." And she literally stopped walking, looked me in the eye with a horrified look on her face and said, "Wait, you don't have a BlackBerry? How are you going to check your emails?"

So, here I've been thinking like I was hiding it and I was being very discreet about it. And it's just they're watching everything you do, they're listening to everything you say. I have to say, I do believe it's important to show them, especially maybe as a single mom, to show them there's responsibilities of work, there's responsibilities of the house, like cooking and I hate to say cleaning, and all the things you do in the house. And it's important because that's how they're going to learn and grow up. My daughter now at 23, she's working a full-time job. She's working very hard. I always say if the last profession on earth was being a lawyer, she would do something else or she'd be unemployed because I don't think she would ever want to be a lawyer, because I think that she has seen how hard we really work and how much it takes.

But she works very hard at her job and she's doing great. And clearly, there's things that I see in her that she picked up along the way from me. So, I see that and I see that it did work. It may not work for everybody. Maybe other people would be better at hiding things. You can't hide everything because in our jobs, there's emergencies. I mean there was even COVID. We were here in the house together for almost two years, working together. She saw everything.

Megan Monson: Yeah. So, I think it's really important that, as you said, you're open and honest about it. Because families, in particular children, notice everything and you're not getting one over on them. I experienced that with my three-year-old at home, too. And I think emphasizing why mommy works has been really helpful for me. And I think it shows a really helping build a strong female as she continues to grow up.

Patricia Barbieri: And if you have a three-year-old, you know not to make any promises or anything that sounds like a promise.

Megan Monson: No, because she never forgets.

Patricia Barbieri: They never forget that, right?

Megan Monson: So, shifting gears a little bit, we know that our successes and missteps can help guide us. Can you tell us about any important professional lessons that you've learned along the way?

Patricia Barbieri: I'll say this, I talked about some of them already, but there's two big important things. And because I'm a control freak by nature, these were very hard for me to embrace. One is the lesson that you can't do everything and you can't do it alone. Those are two important lessons. They're very hard to follow and implement. Again, not perfect. I can't say that I've perfected either of them. But I have over the years, especially in the GC role, you have to learn how to trust your team. And it helps them grow. It helps them feel important, that they're doing important work. It gives them the exposure they need to grow. But also that you can't do it all and you have to learn how to really prioritize your work.

And you have to learn what you can leave to the side for another day or another month, maybe even another year, or just not do. You have to learn that. And again, it won't be perfect, but those are two important things. And if you start as you're early in your career, it kind of becomes easier. It becomes more of a habit. I'll be candid, it's very hard for me.

Megan Monson: Yeah. I experienced those same things, and I wish I had said those same things to my younger self. So, I'm hopeful that these words of advice will be helpful for our female listeners in trying to develop their work style and throughout their career journey.

Pat, you've had such a fascinating career journey. Any thoughts on what you'll do next?

Patricia Barbieri: Well, I'll say this, really no. I have a lot of things maybe in the fire, thinking through. But I will say this, if you saw my LinkedIn post when I announced my retirement, basically my plan was to have no plan. And some days that's easier than others because I am a planner. In fact, I'm like a plan A, plan B, plan C kind of a person. But right now, I'm working the 20 hours a week as a special advisor. I'm trying to fill together time with other things. I'm dabbling in all sorts of different things. But I'm really not planning to do anything as of April 1st, not really jumping into something else. I'm not even sure I'll practice law full-time or part-time again. I don't know. I'll travel. I've taken some classes, including a photography class, ironically.

I will take more classes in the future. I hope to teach. I hope to somehow coach and mentor the next generation of lawyers and paralegals because I think I could really add value there. But that's kind of what I'm looking to do. I'm also looking to volunteer, first I have to take the training, but volunteer at the local veteran's home to honor my dad. That's all the different things I have in the works as possibilities. But I really haven't committed to any specific plan of getting a job or looking for jobs, or any of those things.

Megan Monson: No, that all sounds fantastic. And I know I for one will be on the lookout to see what you continue to do.

Patricia Barbieri: It's almost like I'm taking a gap year. My daughter, every once in a while, she'll be like, "Oh, it's like you're a stay-at-home mom finally." But I also feel like the kids take gap years, so I might do that myself. I never took one.

Megan Monson: 100 percent. And well, that's how you figure out what you want to do with the rest of your time. So, this discussion has been fantastic. And thank you so much for sharing your perspective on these topics. Any final parting words of wisdom for other strong, female professionals out there?

Patricia Barbieri: I'll just say this, and it's really not even just limited to female professionals. I'll say it's practical advice. So, one of the things is you can't really plan your whole life, personal or professional. But it is going to move very fast, you'll see. And it moves faster as you get older, candidly. But enjoy that whole ride because it's the whole purpose of being here. But enjoy it. Learn from all the different roads and detours that you take. And that's it.

Megan Monson: Well, Pat, thank you again for joining us today. I'm sure our listeners have found your insight and perspective very helpful. I know I have. This has been another inspirational and thought-provoking discussion. Thanks for joining us for another episode of the Women's Initiative: Real Talk. We'll see you next time.

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