

*The Path and The Practice - Lauren Champaign
Transcription*

Speaker 1:

Welcome to The Path and The Practice, a podcast dedicated to sharing the professional origin stories of the attorneys at Foley & Lardner LLP, a full service law firm with over 1,000 lawyers in 24 offices across the U.S. and abroad. I'm your host, Alexis Robertson, director of diversity and inclusion at Foley. In each episode of this podcast, you'll hear me interview a different Foley attorney. Through our one-on-one candid conversations, you'll learn about each guest's unique background, path to law school and path to Foley & Lardner.

Speaker 1:

Essentially, you'll hear the stories you won't find on their professional bio, stories of obstacles and triumphs with some funny moments in between, and of course, you'll learn a bit about their practice. Now, let's get to the episode.

Speaker 1:

In this episode, I have a fantastic discussion with Lauren Champaign. Lauren is senior counsel in Foley & Lardner's Washington D.C. office. She's a litigation attorney focused on securities, product liability, anti-trust and consumer finance matters. We have a wide range in discussion. Lauren shares about life growing up in a military family where she moved frequently, but never lost connection with her family in Charleston, South Carolina. Lauren takes the opportunity to tell us about the Gullah community and what it meant to grow up Gullah, speaking Geechee, and what it means to her and the path she chose. Specifically, Lauren shares how being involved in her community is what decided for her, at an early age, that she wanted to be a lawyer.

Speaker 1:

Additionally, Lauren reflects on her time working for the Obama campaign, and finally, Lauren stresses the importance of finding a place to work that allows you to be your authentic self. I hope you enjoy the conversation.

Speaker 1:

Hi, Lauren. Welcome to the podcast.

Speaker 2:

Hey, Alexis. How are you?

Speaker 1:

I am excellent. I'm so excited to have you here today because we share some, I don't know, family roots with that South Carolina connection.

Speaker 2:
Right. South Carolina, yeah!

Speaker 1:
I'm very excited about that, but before we talk a bit about that, I'm going to have you start the way I've had all of my guests, so far, start, which is can you give me that short professional summary you give someone when you're first meeting them and you're introducing yourself?

Speaker 2:
Sure. So, I'm Lauren Champaign. I am a Senior Counsel out of the D.C. office. My practice focused on general commercial litigation, but I have some focuses in securities and consumer law, which has created great avenues. I like to tell people I can take you from the internal problem you had to right down to litigating and defending a disagreement in trial. My practice goes through every piece of that through the counseling and onward.

Speaker 1:
I love that. That's comprehensive. I'm a former general commercial litigator. So when we get to the point where we talk about your practice, I will know more about what's going on, which I just really enjoy, but before we get to that, let's start at the basics. Where are you from? Where did you grow up?

Speaker 2:
So you know that's a little complicated question.

Speaker 1:
Oh, okay. Unpack it for me.

Speaker 2:
I like to say my roots are in South Carolina. Charleston, South Carolina. My parents are childhood sweethearts. They met in middle school. So all of the my family...

Speaker 1:
Wow.

Speaker 2:

Yeah, it's those types of folks. Still married. Where does that happen? All my family is in South Carolina, but my dad is also a 30 year marine corps veteran. So every three years of my life up until high school, I was off to a different place.

Speaker 1:

Wow, okay. Can you recite where you've been, at least from what you can recall? Can we go through it? Let's do the run down.

Speaker 2:

So, funny enough, I did not get a lot of international travel. We traveled just all over the U.S., so California, Rhode Island was the furthest up north. All my Rhode Island folks, I love you, but I never want to live that far up north again. Georgia, North Carolina. My parents lived in Japan and Hawaii for some time, but I always tell this story.

Speaker 2:

My sophomore year of high school, my father's next duty station was Okinawa Japan, and I just had a fit. "There's no way I'm going! I'm not going to graduate overseas!" So he left the family and went a year by himself so that I wouldn't have to spend high school in a foreign country.

Speaker 1:

Do you stand by that decision now? I feel like you might have a little bit of guilt there because you were like, "We never went anywhere cool. We stayed domestic."

Speaker 2:

Yeah, there is a little. You know what? There really is because I know some friends who lived in Germany and had all these cool bases. It's hard to say this now, but at that time, I was very much a product of my environment in terms of small town South Carolina, so the idea of leaving the country, as crazy as that may sound, was just like, "What? No! I'm not leaving my grandma and my neighborhood!" Finally, at that point, we were back in South Carolina, so I was like an hour away from my grandparents for the first time.

Speaker 1:

Now, when was that? Was that by high school you were back?

Speaker 2:

This was the high school. Yeah, we were living. We got stationed in Buford, South Carolina. So we got stationed there, and it was my first time being close to family, and that was important to

me, but now I'm like, "I got to get out of the U.S. I want to go travel." It's a totally different person.

Speaker 1:

Well, the frame of reference changes, but that makes sense because after a year, you said every two, three years you're moving. You finally get back home, and the prospect of moving again, and particularly out of the country, was just like no, but now, in hindsight, you're like, "That could've been an interesting experience."

Speaker 2:

Right. Right. Right.

Speaker 1:

I have to ask some questions about that experience, and the reason the question jumps to mind, in elementary school, I was in three different elementary schools. I felt it made me a bit of a people-person because in that formative time I had to adjust, but you also had to adjust a lot in transitioning. What was that like transferring schools a number of times?

Speaker 2:

I think that's what I appreciate about my military background. At first hated it, as you can imagine. You look up to your family, and you see that they have communities and everyone knows each other, and everyone sort of grows up together. As a young person, that's what I wanted. I wanted to be back in Charleston with all my family, but then I realized, especially now as you get older, those were skills I was picking up, I just had no idea because literally, there were times, the Marine Corps doesn't care if you're in the middle of the school year, or whether there's no housing at the next space, so you have to live with your grandma for two months, and then go to a school.

Speaker 2:

So there were times where I was in 3 or 4 different schools because I'm jumping in and out, depending on whether our housing was ready, whether he has his orders or not. I mean, I had to learn to adjust. I had to be able to talk to people. I had to make friends. I had to be able to pick up and just go with the flow, and it still sits with me now. It's skills that I use right now.

Speaker 1:

Absolutely, and it helps create, in a way, your super powers and your personality because you learned how to get in that new situation and get to know people.

Speaker 2:

Right. I didn't realize how much it helped for a law firm because I think I came into the firm thinking, oh, you just work hard, put your head down, learn how to be the best attorney you can be, and then boom, you're going to rise to the top, but it's so much about relationships.

Speaker 1:

Absolutely.

Speaker 2:

Personally, as an African American female that happens to also look sometimes five years old, when I walk in the room, and sometimes that southern accent comes out. I mean, there are so many stereotypes and so many things that walk in that room with me just because of the voice, the hair, the face. So being able to talk and interact and go beyond those situations is something I just didn't realize I needed.

Speaker 1:

Knowing how to get to know people, and when you said that, because we're on a podcast, I'm trying so hard not to cackle in the background. You maybe saw my face.

Speaker 2:

I did.

Speaker 1:

For listeners, my intention is not to make this like a therapy session, but I will say, I really resonate with a lot of what you said. It's different for me. I moved a number of times in elementary school, but my family was not in the military, but the skills for me were being the black girl in predominantly white schools.

Speaker 2:

Yes.

Speaker 1:

And I was an overweight kid, too. So my personality had to be on point, and I'm certain the fact that I do the work I do now, which in a lot of ways is that kind of cross-cultural, bridging the gap, helping others get to know... It's a direct line from my childhood experience.

Speaker 2:

Right. Right.

Speaker 1:

It's like we have each other on the couch like we're psychiatrists right now. "Let's discuss your childhood." But now, I absolutely understand what you are saying. Here's the big question. When was the seed planted for law school?

Speaker 2:

Oh, since I was a little girl. I'm that kid. As soon as I could articulate a career, I was going to be a lawyer. That's it.

Speaker 1:

Where did that come from? Do you even know or was it just ingrained in you at such a young age?

Speaker 2:

I think what happened was, especially if you're a young girl, like I said, we moved around, but a lot of my experience has been grounded in the south, whether it was Georgia, whether it was North Carolina, whether it was with all my family here in South Carolina, and you start to see some of the challenges African Americans face, especially from the... I'm a Gullah Geechee, from the coast of South Carolina.

Speaker 1:

Wait, we have to pause there because I was actually going to ask. I visited Charleston maybe two, three times, but can you talk briefly about what that means for someone who hasn't heard of Gullah and...

Speaker 2:

Right. That makes sense. I said it as if that's just widely known.

Speaker 1:

And for many people, they may, but I would love if you could just pause on that for one moment.

Speaker 2:

So it just means, especially along the coast of South Carolina and Georgia, there were African Americans that were able to retain much of their African heritage by creating almost a Creole culture and language known as Gullah. Because there are so many barrier islands--I'm currently on one, John's Island--along the coast, and especially during slavery, many of those African Americans populated the area, but they were also isolated from other people. So they were able

to retain a lot of those customs and cultures that, for a lot of African Americans and black people elsewhere, were not as easy or where they were able to do so.

Speaker 2:

I always like to say it's like the strength of my family because despite slavery, despite Jim Crow, and you list that, they were able to continue to retain culture and identity and create something new in this place.

Speaker 1:

I'm just nodding profusely as you share this. For me, like I said, my family's from South Carolina, both sides of my family. My parents met at the University of South Carolina, but my family is one that's the legacy of slavery. If I looked farther back, I'm sure we could figure out the plantations that my family members were on. We don't have any white people within the last four generations. Myself, my parents, my grandparents, my great grandparents, but when I did my 23 and Me, I'm like 43% European.

Speaker 2:
Wow.

Speaker 1:

Pure legacy of slavery and the intermingling that happened there, but it's just so interesting to call out for anybody who's listening because oftentimes, as black culture or "African American" in the United States were viewed as being monolithic.

Speaker 2:
Right.

Speaker 1:

And it's absolutely not the case, and we, obviously, share certain experiences, but I found, when visiting Charleston, the Gullah culture, it's palpable there. You can really see it, and it's part of the tourism.

Speaker 2:
Right!

Speaker 1:

And history of Charleston.

Speaker 2:

Right. It's just sad because we are very proud. I mean, when I hear, we would call it Geechee, some people would try to make it negative. I embrace that term, a Geechee accent. It makes me happy. If you hear it in my voice, I'm happy, but I also know that it's looked upon negatively. There's been a movement in families to sort of erase that history, or you need to succeed so you need to assimilate. There's the battle between the pride and the culture, and like you said, it's a part of tourism here, but at the same time, when you look inward into these families, there's a lot of wrestling with that and being unchained and fighting against negative stereotypes.

Speaker 1:

Yep, which is so important to share. Although, when I stopped you to have you explain what Gullah meant, you were in the process of saying that, I think you were in the process of saying, that your heritage and that experience of being Gullah, being black, being a woman, whatever it is, informed your decision and interest in being a lawyer. I think that's where you were going.

Speaker 2:

That was where I was going because part of what I was seeing, for example, just our land because African Americans have been, at least in this area, and many others, have been cut off from the legal system from so long. They weren't able to go and get their deeds, property cleared and all these things. So as a young girl, I was seeing constantly developers try to manipulate my family's claim on their land because it was heir's property, which is easy to do, and the people that I saw doing something about that were lawyers, or when I saw discrimination happening in schools and you read about Charles Hamilton Houston and Thurgood Marshall. So law is a way to get at all of these different things, and if that's how you do it, gosh dang it, I'm going to be a lawyer. So that was it.

Speaker 1:

That is phenomenal. I'm so glad that I asked. Like you said, since you were a young girl. So what age would you say you were when you became interested?

Speaker 2:

Literally like six or seven. I was so obsessive that the church, you know what black churches are like. From elementary school, I'm telling you, they were calling me the church lawyer.

Speaker 1:

Are you serious?

Speaker 2:

Yes! I was so adamant. My family, everyone, anybody of my life knew that Lauren was going to be a lawyer. In fact, when I took a break between college and law school to work on the campaign, my dad got so mad at me. He was like, "You've been talking about being a lawyer all your life, and you're going to throw it away for this no name guy?" President Obama, but now, everyone is like, [inaudible 00:16:07] At that time they were like, "No, you're the lawyer. You've got to go to law school."

Speaker 1:

Oh my gosh. That's the best story. Okay. Let's fast forward a little bit because you're already getting there, but I'm going to fast forward, I guess, up to college, although I feel like there might be some interesting stories between six year old you and going to college, but because I don't have a three hour podcast with you, which is actually what I want, I have to pick and choose. You go to college. You go to the University of South Carolina, and is it a pre-law sort of major or what was your focus there?

Speaker 2:

It was political science.

Speaker 1:

So pre-law, basically.

Speaker 2:

Basically, yeah. Literally, I was told by my parents, "Well, we don't know." I'm the first the go to law school. "We don't know, but all the lawyers we know are political science majors." I was like, okay. Well, I'm a political science major, but it was one of the best decisions.

Speaker 1:

And then law school. Did you apply straight away? Although, you've already mentioned working on the Obama campaign. So, catch me up. What happened there?

Speaker 2:

I did. I applied right away because, like I said, it was my dream for a while. I actually thought I was going to go to southern school because I love the south with all its good and bad. I love it. Duke was actually my number one school, and then President Obama ran, and I read a book, and was so inspired by him that I said, "Well, A, now I'm going to apply to schools in D.C. because I know he's going to be president. So I'm going to do that." And then I ended up at a Congressional Black Caucus dinner for the South Carolina... I shouldn't say Congressional. I should probably say state legislative black caucus.

Speaker 1:
Hm. Got it.

Speaker 2:
And he was the speaker, and I ended up sitting next to who would soon be the Charleston field director for the campaign, and the rest is history. I joined the primary, and I actually declined Georgetown's scholarship. I asked them to move me a year so I could participate, but the decision of being in D.C. was Obama, and the decision to wait a year was also Obama because I got to work in the primary.

Speaker 1:
Wow. I just want to make sure I'm following. You said you applied right away. Duke was the favorite, but Georgetown because there's this Obama guy. "I want to be in D.C." But then you end up working for the campaign, so that delays law school by about a year, and meanwhile, your family's like, "What are you doing?"

Speaker 2:
Right. I had already gotten into almost all the schools. I got into my dream school, Duke. I got into UVA. I had a full ride to George Washington, and I had the Georgetown. So I was already in schools. I tell this story that I actually had written a check to Duke just to reserve my spot, and then in a matter of days, I got a call from Georgetown giving me a partial scholarship, which was weird because they had already sent me a letter saying I wasn't getting one. So I got that call from them, and then I also got the offer within the same week, and it just changed my whole trajectory.

Speaker 1:
It changed everything, but meanwhile, you said your family was like, "What are you doing pausing this for this guy?"

Speaker 2:
Yeah, they were. Some of my family was really supportive. They were inspired and all of that, but there's always that fear, especially when you're working for someone who could potentially, and was, ultimately the first black president. I mean, one of the first things I heard from a lot of African Americans was, "Something's going to happen to him. Something's going to happen to you. He's never going to make it." At that point, I had to give up my scholarship. You couldn't defer and just hold it even though they eventually did give me back some of that money. So they

were like, "You're throwing away money for a candidate that's not going to win. Even if we all love him, we don't want him to die either."

Speaker 1:

Yeah, they said this can't happen.

Speaker 2:

"It just can't happen, so why are you doing that?"

Speaker 1:

Wow, what a tremendous perspective, though, to look back on because we know it did happen, but wow, to take yourself back there, and then can you share a little bit about what you worked on in that year, what that year was like?

Speaker 2:

Oh my gosh. It was one of the best experiences of my life to be honest with you. I started in South Carolina, which was great because I got to be in Charleston and organize. So I spent almost a year, because we started very early in the season, doing a community organizing model, where you literally went in people's homes and just talked about your story and talked about the candidate, and you built these personal relationships and community teams that then ran the election day activities, and they were doing it with all volunteers, just people that were excited and motivated.

Speaker 2:

And then after that, we had jumped primary to primary until we finally won the nomination, but it was just exciting, just around the clock. It probably was good preparation for law firm life because I was living with my parents and they never saw me because it was like, in the mornings you had meetings, and then you were out knocking on doors, and then you came back to the office and you were recording your supporters and meeting with volunteers. It was 12, 15 hour days every day.

Speaker 1:

What a special time. I've noticed, I think it's okay for me to say, I've never volunteered on campaigns, especially not at a meaningful level, but I know a number of people, particularly in the Chicago area who were a part of that Obama volunteer staffer thing, whatever you want to call it, 2008-ish, and there's a connection between all of you. There's this bond.

Speaker 2:

It's a real bond.

Speaker 1:

Yes. I can't quite put my finger on it, but most of you all know each other for whatever reason, but if you don't, you still know each other.

Speaker 2:

Right. Well, I think what it is is when you believe in a person that much and you agree to put your life on hold for next to nothing because we weren't getting paid much and you are doing it in the face of everyone telling you you're not going to do it, that's a certain type of person who's going to do that in the first place. So think there's like a kinship there that just can't be [inaudible 00:22:54]. I've worked on a lot, even some of his re-election campaigns on and off. There's nothing like that 2008 group of people that came together.

Speaker 1:

You all know each other. You just know each other. I don't know, it's like on a soulful level. It's amazing. Okay. I'm going to keep moving forward here. At some point, it's time to go to law school.

Speaker 2:

Right.

Speaker 1:

What happened? How did you go back to Georgetown, got some of the money back? Tell me more.

Speaker 2:

I didn't always have the best experiences visiting schools, particularly as an African American prospective law student. You did not always feel welcome, and I'm the type of person, again, this might be the military background, I'll go stop a student in the hallway and be like, "Hey, I'm a prospective student. Tell me more about your school." Some of the stories I would hear about the microaggressions and things that were happening just didn't feel great, but I went into Georgetown and didn't feel that. That was the first thing that made Georgetown [crosstalk 00:23:59] [inaudible 00:23:59] I felt comfortable, and I found community there with BLSA, and I was always in the admissions office. Those people...

Speaker 1:

And BLSA, for those who don't know, is the Black Law Students Association.

Speaker 2:

Exactly, and I found a community with even the administration. They helped me get my first internships and things like that. Everyone talks about the terror of...

Speaker 1:

Law school.

Speaker 2:

Law school exams and all that stuff, which it was for me, personally. I don't like law school, but the sense of community that I had at Georgetown is just above and beyond.

Speaker 1:

That's so great to hear. I, actually, for law school, was between Georgetown and the University of Michigan. I went to Michigan because I went to American for undergrad, so I had already spent four years in D.C., but I vividly remember touring the Georgetown University Law Center campus, and they have a really cool Supreme Court room. I thought it was super neat to know they're mooted all these cases, and it looks just like the Supreme Court, and I also remember the dean of admissions, at one point, being like, "Of course you'd want to come here because we have this." And he kind of motioned across the city, and I knew the city at that point, so I didn't have that as the allure, but I can understand a bit about what you're saying because I do think there's some real special things going on at Georgetown.

Speaker 1:

So you start school. How was law school for you? You just said not your favorite, but overall, how was that experience?

Speaker 2:

Overall it was good. I mean, I think, well, I know one year was transformative as it probably is for a lot of us. You really do, people say it all the time, learn to think like a lawyer, and that, for sure, is what happened in all its prodding and pushing and driving you crazy and all the telephones home saying, "I don't think I'm going to make it." You do come out of it with that.

Speaker 1:

You already were the church lawyer, though, too. You already were thinking like a lawyer.

Speaker 2:

I was. That's true. That's true, I guess, but you know what's fine? I keep going back to community, but I think I'm one of those people that really worked hard to make law school practical for me, which meant that once one year was over, I immediately found every way not to be at Georgetown. I had externships. I was at the DOJ. I was at advancement project. I was at anywhere that would take me to get real legal experience.

Speaker 1:

That's amazing. I love what you just said is, "I found a way to make law school practical for me." I just have to pause on that for a moment because I do think legal education has changed since I graduated, closing in on 15 years ago, but there is that component that it's very easy to just be in the classroom, very in theory. I just really appreciate you saying what you just said.

Speaker 2:

That was my goal. It was just like, I don't want to be here for two more years of theory. I want to be a lawyer, and that childhood girl who wanted to be practicing law, she didn't die. She just suddenly was like, "Okay. Now I have two years to try to figure it out and get as much experience as I can, and write." I feel like it did help. I came into the firm with briefs under my belt.

Speaker 1:

That's amazing. Like I told you before we started recording, I pull everyone up on LinkedIn, that's just what I do. You did a number of things between graduating from law school and joining Foley & Lardner.

Speaker 2:

Right.

Speaker 1:

Can you share a little? I'm obviously keenly focused on how eventually Foley came onto the scene, but I would love if you would share a little bit about you graduated from law school and then what?

Speaker 2:

So in between during law school or after?

Speaker 1:

Let's jump ahead to after law school.

Speaker 2:

Okay. I mean, after law school, I jumped, really, right to Foley. I think I had done a lot of work, and honestly, I don't know if I should say that I'm involved with Bobcats, but I always thought that I was going to be a civil rights attorney, and much of my work before that had been in that area, but then I met the Foley folks.

Speaker 1:

And that is what I see, an extern with a civil rights division of Department of Justice and all of that.

Speaker 2:

Right. So when I came to Foley, it was with that vein in mind, and even after summering, I was still, "Ah, maybe I want to do something else," but the people at Foley and ultimately the work I was doing actually motivated me to come to the law firm, and honestly, to stay now. I've been here nine years, but I think one of the great things Foley does is, we bring in people from every perspective, every background, political affiliation, and they still encourage you to be able to do that and still be a good lawyer because I took a--I don't want to say a sabbatical, but for the re-election time, I took some time off, unpaid leave, to do that, and that was great. I guess that would've been 2016?

Speaker 1:

2012.

Speaker 2:

Oh, 2012. Yeah. 2012 would be right. I'm thinking about the last election.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, I saw that on here. Deputy GOTV Director, Obama for America.

Speaker 2:

Yeah, yes. I worked in the last few months there in Philadelphia helping with the re-election campaign.

Speaker 1:

That's awesome. Okay, maybe a little bit less exciting but something that I think a lot of people are curious about, although, for you, I understand why you're a litigator. I get it. I think every word you just said over the past 30 minutes just explained it, but can you talk about how you decided on your practice area and your areas of focus within litigation?

Speaker 2:

I think, like a lot of young associates, sometimes your work gets tailored to who you work well with and what you find interesting, and I was that person. I didn't know any lawyers, certainly not a corporate lawyer at a law firm. So I really used my first three years to try to figure out what's going on? What's the work that they're doing, and just getting my feet wet in a lot of different areas. People told me, you'd eventually work it out, and that's ultimately what happened. You start working and it's like, "Oh, this is where the synergies are. These are the things I like to do. These are the people I like to work with." And then you figure that out.

Speaker 1:

Now, unpack for me. You already said what you focus on, but that was 30 minutes ago. Remind us again. Your practice area encompasses what exactly?

Speaker 2:

I do commercial litigation, which can be anything from a simple breach of contract claim to a multi-district litigation on anti-trust matters. Right? My focus areas tend to be in consumer law and securities. On the consumer law side, it's a lot of defending companies where they may be accused of false advertising or unfair and deceptive business practices, something like that. On the security side, I actually do a lot of nontraditional litigation, more of defending companies against government investigations or working internally with a company when they may suspect something has happened that may have violated a law and working with our team to dig into that issue and help them address the issue and understand their options.

Speaker 1:

And that's back to what you said about basically having a really comprehensive practice where you can start from the internal investigation side, kind of at the inception of wherever that happened, and if necessary, take it all the way to court.

Speaker 2:

Right, and also deal with not only the... We have a lot of manufacturing clients, and I do a lot of manufacturing work. There's always these interesting interconnected supply chain relationships that you have to think about, and then there's also this whole other world when you get out of just businesses fighting against one another or litigating against each other, but the unique dance you have to have with government, whether it's the SEC or the CFPV or any of these other agencies.

Speaker 1:

It's a whole other level, though, a whole other administrative law type of level of things.

Speaker 2:
Right.

Speaker 1:
Well, I'm going to switch gears a little bit in our last few minutes together, and I just want to [inaudible 00:32:54]. I know right now, you've said all this amazing stuff about all these amazing things you do, and right now, you also have a... It's a one year old daughter?

Speaker 2:
Yes. 22 months. Almost 2 years old, now.

Speaker 1:
Closing in on two.

Speaker 2:
Yeah.

Speaker 1:
I would be remiss to not ask you about navigating life as a lawyer with the under two set at home, as well. By the way, we're recording this in July 2020, also amidst a global pandemic.

Speaker 2:
Right.

Speaker 1:
Things are particularly hard right now, maybe not at all representative of normal time, but I would love to get your reflections on this right now, Lauren. It's hard. It's hard.

Speaker 2:
Yeah. I don't even know where to start. It's difficult. It's extremely difficult, and I think it was hard before the pandemic, before racial uprising and the like. Right, but having a young daughter that really needs your attention is always around and on your legs, it's difficult to get much done, and it's also...

Speaker 1:
You're working around nap time.

Speaker 2:

Right! You're working around nap time. You're working around potty training. You're working around all these things, and it's both like the physical taxation, but also emotionally draining because you have to look at her and explain why you have to work or why you're on a call, and they just don't have the mental space or emotional maturity to understand that, and it's hard. It's very, very hard.

Speaker 1:

And something that, I think, as we enter, what, the fourth month of this, I am concerned about how things are starting to get normalized and that perhaps people aren't cutting themselves the break or being as compassionate to themselves as maybe they were, say, in March when you could be like, "Oh, this is hard. This is weird." But we've settled into this being our new normal, at least for now, and we all, at some point, particularly those of us with little kids at home. So my kids are now seven and nine. It's admittedly much easier because, I hate to say it, but you're like, "Here. You can watch TV." You can't do that with your 20...because they don't want to, but I do have to remind myself, this still is not normal.

Speaker 2:

No, it's so true, and I hope it comes with a little bit of a reckoning because you see a lot of people talking about how hard it must be for parents, especially parents of young children, but I don't think they really fully understand how hard it is to manage and do all these things from an emotional perspective, and also what does that say about working parents moving forward? One the side, it's hard, but on the other side, there are moments where you're like "Oh, but I've had time to cook as a family and time to sing and read to her that I didn't have as much of before."

Speaker 2:

The question is, why does it take a pandemic to allow that type of family time, as well? I feel like we need to reimagine what it means to be a working parent, and we need to not only in the firm but the country as a whole to be thinking about the message it's sending about work ethic, about what it means to be value add in your family, as well. I'm hoping that's all the types of conversations we're going to have out of this.

Speaker 1:

Well, and this level of, maybe, intentionality that we bring to the discussion because as we talk about "return to normal", was normal-normal, and what of this do we maybe want to take with us into whatever our new normal becomes? Just those really hard questions, and then to bring up

even more hard questions, but things that we already sort of touched on. As you said, we have had this, I'm calling it a new civil rights movement because I think for black people in America, it's nothing that we didn't already know about. We were keenly aware of, but we now have this collective awakening, I guess you would say, around systemic racism added on top of the Coronavirus pandemic, and it's an interesting time, to say the least.

Speaker 1:

I will narrow our reflections, maybe, to just law firms, but in my role at firms, I can't help but be a little optimistic now that we have so much more attention, it means some of the things I've been recommending for years that whether it be related to our firm or the industry, and I often talk about the industry and don't just kind of pick on Foley because there's nothing particularly unique about the dynamics we have. Although, I do find at Foley, we actually have a few more black partners than some other firms, which is unfortunate, by the way.

Speaker 2:

There's not that many, but...

Speaker 1:

But we do, but it's a really interesting time. I know for you, you mentioned everything from just the dynamics of trying to interview or just check out law schools as a black women, and there's just so many things, I think, day-to-day that we will carry that maybe those in the majority aren't aware of, and now they're a little more aware.

Speaker 2:

Right.

Speaker 1:

I guess would be the way to say it. So I'm curious, if we get people to listen to this podcast, beyond those who work at Foley & Lardner, I don't know, maybe we get some law students. Do you have any advice, or if you could give that advice to your 15 year old church lawyer self about what would your reflections be to her?

Speaker 2:

I think my reflection would be to just stay true to yourself because I think so often, especially when it comes to law schools and law firms and this idea of being a cultural fit somewhere, you're sometimes sort of bending yourself backwards, not to be... Don't be too political. Don't wear your hair in braids. Don't wear a particular suit skirt without stockings, or whatever crazy... Well, I shouldn't say crazy. Some people believe in that. Whatever.

Speaker 1:

I was told you can't wear pants to an interview. You just can't.

Speaker 2:

That's what I was told. Those kind of things, I think, honestly, it's a two-way street. Where you are, whether that be law school or a law firm, you have to be comfortable there, and you being your authentic self creates avenues for not only others to be their authentic selves but also to share your diversity and all the things that make you great with people that may not share your background, and I think we do our selves a disservice if we don't do that because I could tell you, the thing that I get praise for the most are things I learned from some of the smartest people I know that are my grandparents and my grandma, who, some of them, because of the system, never made it out of middle school or could never have imagined being where I am today, but those are things that came from them, and those are the things that make me great.

Speaker 2:

I think, to your point about seizing the moment, I think those are things that allow us to really share our experience, but really work on systematic changes in spaces that there aren't many of us, but being true, if we're not showing that we're not monolithic and we're not bringing our own experience and our own strength to the situation, we've missed an opportunity.

Speaker 1:

Absolutely. Then, I have to ask this, and now it's going to sound like a sales pitch. So I apologize to Lauren. I apologize to the listeners, but I have to ask, do you feel like you've been able to bring your authentic self to Foley & Lardner?

Speaker 2:

I do. I do, and that is not a sales pitch. That is not a sales pitch because I don't even do them. I don't even know how to do it.

Speaker 1:

No, because I'm thinking you happen to be political. We're talking right now, and you're in braids, and obviously, we're not in the office, but I feel like you are able to be you, and that's amazing. It's not something that we can all do, professionally.

Speaker 2:

No, and honestly, it's something that I decided if I couldn't do... I came to Foley, I kid you not, with Barack Obama pin on, kinky twists in my hair with just a tinge of color, professional, but still

hair style that I liked to wear, and I did that for a reason, despite being told that you should do none of those things. I did it because I wanted to make sure I was at a place that would accept me for me and wouldn't care what candidate, what location in the U.S. I was from, the accent I had, anything, that they would just look at me as a potential lawyer and look at me for the skills that I bring to the table. I'm here, so I guess Foley didn't care about all that other stuff.

Speaker 1:

Oh my gosh. Well, that's amazing. I think on that note, we're going to end. I do like to ask, if people wanted to get in touch with you, is the best way to check out Foley's website, shoot you an email if anybody had questions?

Speaker 2:

Absolutely.

Speaker 1:

All right. Well, thank you so much, Lauren, for your time. I, like I said, could talk to you for hours more, but I will stop. Thank you so much for joining me today.

Speaker 2:

I enjoyed it. This was fun.

Speaker 1:

Aw, thanks, Lauren.

Speaker 1:

Thank you for listening to The Path and the Practice. I hope you enjoyed the conversation and join us again next time, and if you did enjoy it, please share it, subscribe and leave us a review because your feedback on the podcast is important to us. Also, please note that this podcast may be considered attorney advertising and is made available by Foley & Lardner LLP for informational purposes only. This podcast does not create an attorney-client relationship. Any opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of Foley & Lardner LLP, its partners or its clients. Additionally, this podcast is not meant to convey the firm's legal position on behalf of any client, nor does it intend to convey specific legal advice.