

Alexis Robertson:

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 across the US 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 in conversation with a different Foley attorney. You'll learn about each guest's unique background, path to law school, and path to Foley & Lardner. Essentially, you'll hear the stories you won't find on their professional bios, and of course, you'll learn a bit about their practice. Now, let's get to the episode.

Alexis Robertson:

Today, I'm speaking with Larry Perlman. Larry's a partner in Foley's Miami office, where he's a member of the firm's Labor and Employment Practice Group. I'm beyond thrilled to have Larry on the show because he is a good friend of mine. But as you'll soon hear, the reason he's on the show is not just because he's my friend, but because he had an incredibly interesting path to law. You see, before Larry was a lawyer, he was a doctor. That's right. He was a practicing internal medicine physician who left medicine to attend law school. In this episode, you'll hear Larry share about his path to medicine, what he did as a doctor, and how and why he made the difficult decision to leave his medical practice.

Alexis Robertson:

Larry also reflects on law school and discusses how he managed balancing studying with his responsibilities to his family, which at the time included a two year old and a newborn baby. Also, Larry provides some really profound and important advice about finding the time for self-reflection, especially the time to ask yourself the hard questions.

Alexis Robertson:

Candidly, this is a full circle conversation for me that is 15 years in the making. After Larry and I recorded this, he said to me, "There's so much you didn't ask. I could have talked for five hours. We'll have to do a part two next year," so I hope you really enjoy our conversation and that you give Larry and I an excuse to do a part two.

Alexis Robertson:

Larry Perlman, welcome to the show.

Larry Perlman:

Thank you, Alexis. I'm Larry Perlman. I'm an employment attorney with Foley & Lardner and I'm a partner in our lovely Miami office.

Alexis Robertson:

All right. You listen to the show too many times, because you just jumped in and did your intro without me asking, but that's great. So, you are a partner. You're in the Miami office, Larry, but you weren't born a lawyer. In fact, in another life, you were actually a doctor. So, let's start at the beginning. Before we even get to either of those, where did you grow up? Where are you from, Larry?

Larry Perlman:

I grew up in Brooklyn, New York.

Alexis Robertson:

What was it like in Brooklyn? What was childhood like for you?

Larry Perlman:

Well, that's a sort of general question, so let me-

Alexis Robertson:

It is. I want more detail.

Larry Perlman:

Open-ended questions, fantastic, Alexis.

Alexis Robertson:

That's right. It's the opposite of what you normally do as a lawyer.

Larry Perlman:

So when I tell people I grew up in Brooklyn, to most people, other than fellow Brooklynites, they start telling me about their friends in Brooklyn Heights or Park Slope or Williamsburg, and then they ask me and say, "Do you know Joe from Park Slope?" They start talking about these neighborhoods, and I usually tell them, "You've never heard of where I grew up. You have no idea where I grew up. It's not the Brooklyn you've heard of. It's not the Brooklyn you see on TV, except for maybe Saturday Night Fever." But I grew up in a neighborhood called Bensonhurst, which actually is where Saturday Night Fever took place, the John Travolta movie in the late '70s, and that's basically a working class neighborhood not too far from Coney Island in the southern part of Brooklyn.

Alexis Robertson:

So before we keep going, this is now where I have to say, so Larry, you and I, we are friends. We've known each other well before I joined Foley, actually a little bit before you joined Foley, and I think you made the comment to me about growing up in the Saturday Night Fever location before, and something about John Travolta eating pizza in the opening, and the proper way to eat pizza. You saying that just brought that back.

Alexis Robertson:

But before we move forward, let me give you further context. You and I went to law school together, and before you were a partner at Foley & Lardner, you were my moot court partner at Michigan. That's important for us to share.

Larry Perlman:

That is important, and you were my moot court partner, and since we're amongst friends here, let's brag and say the team of Alexis and Larry made it all the way to the semi-finals our year, correct?

Alexis Robertson:

We did. We did really well. I think had we been on law review, we would have made it to the finals.

Larry Perlman:

I recall a sense of disappointment shared with relief, because if you recall, we were in the middle of finals studying, et cetera, and this was the end of the semester, and we felt pretty good about ourselves, right? We got to semi-finals. The finals, one of the judges was Judge Kozinsky, then from the Ninth Circuit, who came down, and I remember sitting with you and watching the finalists, who just did a fantastic job; it didn't seem fun at all, though, arguing before Judge Kozinsky as a law student. So, I think we got the good end of the deal.

Alexis Robertson:

It did not seem fun, and here's my segue to get us back on track. I don't remember what we were even arguing about. We're not going to talk about that, but I do remember watching the finals, and a questions came up that was relevant to something related to medicine. I remember thinking, I wish we were arguing that, because you have said, "Actually, as a former medical doctor, da da da da da." But anyway, here's what I got so far.

Larry Perlman:

This is the segue coming in here.

Alexis Robertson:

Here's what I got so far. I have you grew up in Brooklyn; I've told people that you were a doctor and now you're a lawyer. Walk me through... I would say, when did you want to be a lawyer, but I know that happened later. Talk to me first about why you were a doctor.

Larry Perlman:

Well, maybe it didn't happen later, right? Maybe I wanted to be a lawyer all along and I inadvertently fell into being a doctor.

Alexis Robertson:

Oh, my goodness.

Larry Perlman:

So, everything comes full circle, and when you asked about where I grew up and the type of neighborhood I grew up, I grew up in, like I said, a working class neighborhood. There were not many doctors or lawyers who lived in my neighborhood; certainly, there were service providers. At the time I went to high school... which, I went to high school in Manhattan at Stuyvesant High School, which was a totally different world from Brooklyn, and I took the train every day, but I digress... but I did learn to straddle a couple of worlds, but the world of my core childhood was one where not many people grew up to become lawyers or doctors. I go on all kinds of tangents, by the way.

Larry Perlman:

I will digress... there is one very famous professional from my neighborhood. His name is Anthony Fauci, and so Dr. Fauci is from my neighborhood. It's Dr. Fauci and Larry from Foley & Lardner, right?

Larry Perlman:

But in any event, my family did not have doctors, did not have lawyers; and so, I'm in high school, I'm in this high-paced, competitive high school, and I'm applying to colleges. I had every intention of going pre-law. That was what my plan was. I was on the varsity debate team, I did pretty well, and that's what I thought my path would be, and lo and behold, one of the colleges I applied to is the University of Michigan. They had a program at the time called Inteflex. There's no R in it. People call it Interflex; it was Inteflex, almost like with that Brooklyn accent.

Larry Perlman:

The whole point of the Inteflex program was to take folks who may not ordinarily go into medicine, not the real hardcore science-minded kids, and say, "You know what? You're not

hardcore science-minded, but you seem pretty smart. You did well in your science courses"... and I had even done some lab research during high school... "but you're more of a liberal arts type. We get that, and we think medicine can use more liberal arts types, so if you get accepted to our program, we will give you a guaranteed admission to the University of Michigan Med School." You can only do seven years, and cost was a big issue for my family and me at the time, and you're guaranteed to become a doctor coming out of it, and then go do something wonderful with your liberal arts inclinations and your medical degree.

Larry Perlman:

Given that I did not know doctors, I did not know lawyers, to me, this was the golden ticket. I love, love, love where I grew up and love everything that came with it, but this was, wow, I get to stake out my life on my own. I'm going to be a doctor. I'm going to have that M.D. after my name, and all I have to do is get accepted to this program. That's fantastic. Go ahead. Let's do it. Problem was, with the wisdom of a 17-year-old, or lack thereof, I didn't really think about the fact that besides having an M.D. after my name, that you kind of have to be a doctor when you go through that many years of training.

Larry Perlman:

But that's how I ended up in medical school. Shall I go on to how I ended up in law school?

Alexis Robertson:

You should. Just keep-

Larry Perlman:

Okay, I don't want to make your job too easy, Alexis.

Alexis Robertson:

Before you do, I want to talk a little bit about the whole medical school part.

Larry Perlman:

Sure.

Alexis Robertson:

Okay. It's all so hysterical for me, because at this point, I've known you for 15 years or so, and I've never once asked you, "Hey, why did you become a doctor?" So, this is new information for me, as well.

Alexis Robertson:

But as a part of your professional path, so you do, you do that. You do that program. You go to undergraduate, you go to med school, and then what? Was there residency? What happened after that?

Larry Perlman:

I went to med school, and I will say... and people are going to hate me for saying this, people on the podcast... but I have this odd quirk... well, one of many quirks. I like taking exams. I didn't mind taking the bar exam. I didn't mind taking a second bar exam. I don't mind the exams in med school, which probably is to my detriment, because I get caught in these situations.

Larry Perlman:

In any event, I go the University of Michigan Medical School. It was challenging, but I completed medical school, and like most folks who go to medical school, I matched for residency, and I, at the time, did my residency in internal medicine back in New York at Long Island Jewish Medical Center. I moved to New York, back home, 20 miles from home home. I spent the next three years in internal medicine residency, then I spent a fourth year as Chief Resident, which is an extra year where you kind of have a training and administration role with respect to the other residents. You're sort of the buffer between the full-time administration and the residents to make sure everything runs smoothly and there's not any trouble that can't be avoided.

Larry Perlman:

After that... okay, so I've done four years of residency, and then in the meantime, while I was in Michigan studying, I met Varisa, who you know, who is my wife. Her family is from Michigan, and her parents are both pediatricians, so our plan always was after residency... she came to New York to do residency, also, but we moved back to Michigan so that she could work with her mom in her mom's practice up in suburban Detroit.

Larry Perlman:

So, I went to Michigan, as well, after Varisa completed residency. I joined an internal medicine private practice in Wyandotte, Michigan, which is about 10 miles south of Detroit, and I spent the next three years as an attending doing general internal medicine practice... and then one day, I woke up and applied to law school, and that's all.

Alexis Robertson:

I'm not done. I'm not done with medicine yet. I'm going to ask a little bit more, because I think I know what an internal medicine doctor does and is, but I really might be wrong. So, what is internal medicine? What you were doing as an attending?

Larry Perlman:

Internal medicine, the simplest way to put it is, it is non-surgical care of adults. If I was a general surgeon, I'd be operating on people. I did not operate on people. I did not take care of children. I did not do obstetrics and gynecology, except for maybe simple exams or diagnosis, as things may be.

Larry Perlman:

In my private practice, this was your typical... I think we had maybe six full-time attending physicians when I was practicing. We would see our cadre of patients every day, and it would, again, run the gamut from, I have a sore throat, I have pneumonia, I have flu-like symptoms, to, Dr. Perlman, treat my diabetes, treat my hypertension; I've been feeling depressed and anxious for the past six months and I need help... everything that you can think of that folks go to the doctor for.

Larry Perlman:

Again, the way medicine works, young, healthy people don't go to the doctor very much, and so you end up doing a lot of care of folks who have chronic illnesses and geriatric population, because those are the folks who are coming in every couple of weeks, and you're managing diabetes, you're managing cardiac medications, et cetera, et cetera. Along with that, I would spend, especially as a newer attending, you'd spend your mornings... and I had one other partner who I'd do this with... you go to the hospital, and if patients are admitted to your service, you manage the hospital care. So, Ms. Smith is in the hospital with pneumonia, you go in, you see Ms. Smith; you check the order, you check all the lab results, you check the X-ray, you examine her; you write the orders for the rest of the day, you work on the care plan for going home, and then you leave the hospital, and you're probably late for all your patients who are not happy that you're late.

Alexis Robertson:

All right, so that's what you did for three years, and as you were saying that, I remembered something I learned from you many years ago about the difference between doctors and... oh, help me here, Larry.

Larry Perlman:

Lawyers?

Alexis Robertson:

Well, not that. We're not there yet. But when you have the long coat versus the short, white coat... and so, I was like, "All right, so Larry did the four years of residency, three years of

internal medicine," and then I was like, "Is that wearing the long coat the entire time?" What's the difference?

Larry Perlman:

With some exceptions, because there's no law in this, it's all tradition and the tradition of medicine that's been passed down... in general, when you're a medical student, you wear the short coat, and then you graduate medical school, you get that M.D., or if you're in a D.O. program, you get a D.O. or an M.D. after your name... you generally wear the long coat while you're a resident.

Larry Perlman:

Now, the simplest way to explain what residency is... it's basically being an associate at a big law firm.

Alexis Robertson:

That's so validating for me, because I've said that before. I was like, "It's kind of like your residency." But go on.

Larry Perlman:

So, you're a doctor. You have that degree. You can treat patients. You can do all that, but you have close supervision, just as when, especially you're a junior associate at a big law firm, you work as part of a team. And so, even though I could prescribe medications, I had the prescription pad, I was not going to make the overall plan of care decisions as a resident without my attending's buy-in... with the caveat that at 3:00 in the morning, I sure was, when you're on call and you're the only one there. But in general, there is a whole hierarchy. You're treating, you're a physician; you're also learning.

Larry Perlman:

Now, technically... and our healthcare colleagues may tell me why I'm wrong, but I don't practice healthcare law... but at least in my experience, my understanding is I could technically go out and say, "You know what? I finished medical school. I did"... in most states, I believe it's one year... again, sorry healthcare colleagues, correct me if I'm wrong... do just one year of training post-medical school, hang out a shingle, and say, "I'm going to see patients who want to pay me. Come pay me," and not finish that internal medicine or pediatrics or surgery or whatever residency it is. That, technically, can occur. Most insurers will not pay me. Most hospitals will not give me privileges. For example, I'm not going to get reimbursed by Medicare, probably.

Larry Perlman:

So, if you're going to practice medicine in the United States of America, with few exceptions, you're going to complete a residency, because completing that specialty residency, and then if you do a fellowship for a sub-specialty, that gives you the privilege to practice in these certain ways. It also gives, obviously, society and our patients the assurance that I've gone through this rigorous program where I've treated patients and trained, et cetera, and that I can do everything I should be able to.

Alexis Robertson:

That's perfect. Thank you so much for elaborating. All right, so I'm going to tell you my understanding of why you decided to stop medicine and become a lawyer, and then go ahead and fill in the gaps. The story I recall is actually from law school graduation. There was a party after. You and Varisa threw it, and you took a moment to say some words, and you shared about an incident where you realized you did not want to be a doctor anymore... that one moment, at least, was when you said somebody got bile on your tie. You were like, "It was a nice tie, and I just realized I didn't want to deal with this type of thing anymore!"

Larry Perlman:

It was actually pus, but you have a good memory.

Alexis Robertson:

[inaudible 00:16:41] someone got your pus on your tie. Sorry for being graphic. Fine, I change it over the years! I don't even know if that would be embellishing, I think that made it better, but go on. Is that it? What was the thought process? What happened in your life?

Larry Perlman:

So this is the risk of having a close friend interview me on the podcast, because now you're going to use prior statements against me, and that was the party statement, holding the drink with the toast, right? I assure you, dear listeners, it wasn't because I was afraid of bodily fluids. I would have left long before that... although I am a good creature of inertia, as evidenced by how long I stayed in medicine.

Larry Perlman:

What it was was this, and there are always many reasons, but the key was: intellectually, I had gone through my residency, and residency is this whirlwind. It's so intense, and you're in the hospital for 100 hours a week; you're with your colleagues, and it's almost like this training-type environment where you don't have much time to reflect on where your life is going and what you're doing. And so, I go from residency, I start practicing, I start seeing paychecks the like of which I never would have imagined, which were... those were pleasant.

Larry Perlman:

Three years into it, my... and this is one of the differences from law firms... my boss hands me a partnership agreement and says, "Oh, it's three years. That's a really long time. You should become a partner here," and I panicked, and shaking and chills. It's funny, the day he gave me the partnership agreement, I had to have one of our nurses insert an IV into me because I almost passed out, which if you want to talk psychosomatic, it doesn't get any more psychosomatic than that, because spoiler alert, I don't think I was sick, I was nervous.

Alexis Robertson:

Your body was responding to that commitment.

Larry Perlman:

Yeah, right? That's pretty impressive, right?

Larry Perlman:

So, I go back, I talk to my wife, who... you know Varisa well, my true north star who knows me better than I know myself, and we try to figure out what the problem is. She's a pediatrician; at the time, she loved her job, absolutely loved it; stacks of every pediatrics journal with the pictures of the kids with the nasty lesions all over them, and she's eating them up... and I never loved my job the way she did, and she knew it. She said, "The problem, Larry, is you don't like your job the way I do, and you can't see yourself doing this for 30 years." I said, "Oh yes, I can," and she said, "Oh no, you can't. You just can't articulate it. Instead, you almost pass out and get an IV put in."

Larry Perlman:

So we go through this, and what it really came to be... the short version, to the extent I can make it short, is... I loved the people, I loved the patients, I loved the interactions. I loved being this trusted advisor to human beings who gave me their information and held things in confidence and trust, and I helped them through circumstances, but intellectually, the practice of medicine did not do much for me. It just didn't. I mean, you'd put a journal in front of me, I wouldn't open it; actually, that's not true. I would open it to look at the death notices, because they often do it for certain specialties. I found that interesting. I found the help wanted ads interesting. The hardcore articles about drug trials of whatever? I just glaze over. I mean, no insomnia. Sleep in five, 10 minutes.

Larry Perlman:

I say to myself, and this is going to sound presumptuous, but I said, "You're a pretty smart person, and that's kind of not cool that you're in a job where you're not really using your intellectual capacities." What I say to everyone when I explain this is, I am a big fan of science. I respect science. I believe in science. I think it is critically important that we have folks who devote their lives to science, and who make discoveries and have this intellectual curiosity that helps us all. I didn't have that intellectual curiosity, not about medicine, and so... I think I was a good doctor. My patients liked me. I still have some patients I keep in touch with. I was a good advisor. But I wasn't doing the best for them if I wasn't completely intellectually engaged, and I wasn't doing the best for myself, I wasn't doing the best for my family if I was stuck in a job where I wasn't intellectually engaged, and the second part, which is critically important... I had the privilege where I could do something else.

Larry Perlman:

I come from family... I think of my grandparents; they had no choice, right? My grandfather was a fishmonger. He would work from 5:00 in the morning until 9:00 PM. He's slinging fish and slicing it. It's just this whole whirlwind, and to make not that much money, right? He couldn't say, "You know what? I'm sick of being a fishmonger. I think I'm going to be an author." That choice did not exist. I'm very fortunate I had a wife who... I still have a wife, thankfully... who was financially secure and extremely supportive, and I was in a position where I was able to follow my intellectual curiosity, and for a variety of reasons, which I can talk about... you may ask me... I find that the practice of law piques my intellectual interest more than medicine did. It was simple and complicated as that.

Alexis Robertson:

I'm glad I asked, because there was way more to the story than, like you said, just kind of an anecdote delivered at a party. Also, slow clap for Varisa. I won't clap. I don't want to mess up our audio, but how incredibly insightful... she just laser-focused, and just dove in, and said exactly what was going on.

Alexis Robertson:

Although I know that she was very supportive, it still probably felt like a big deal to actually, what, apply to law school after having been out of school at that point for, what, seven-plus years? To actually quit your job... so, talk about the application process, and for you, was it just the one application to Michigan?

Larry Perlman:

Yeah. So, this was... it sounds like, "Larry, why are you even saying this? This is a duh moment"... this was a big decision, right?

Alexis Robertson:
Right.

Larry Perlman:

Without trying to make any comment on any other institutions or anything, I was in Michigan. We had no plans of moving at the time. We had family support. My wife had just a great work situation. And so, the deal was, if I'm going to go for it, I'm going to go big. The highest-ranked law school in the state of Michigan that I could theoretically commute to is the University of Michigan, so let me take the LSAT, I'll see how I do; if I do well on the LSAT, I'll apply to Michigan; if I get in, great; if not, it wasn't meant to be. I'll think of something else. I took the LSAT, I did pretty well, I got in to Michigan, and so I started at the University of Michigan law school.

Alexis Robertson:

And that is where you became my moot court partner, the end of the story. No, I'm just kidding.

Alexis Robertson:

A couple of random things to share, particularly for the Foley folks who listen to the podcast. I've heard potentially, and I hope David Sanders does not get upset at me, a little bit of resentment that you're one of the rare people who has three degrees from the University of Michigan... so, just wanted to say that out loud.

Alexis Robertson:

But also, let's talk about you going to law school. You go to law school. Was the intellectual curiosity met? I mean, at this point, I have this kind of outside perspective of you, because we were in the same section; that's how we got to know each other. But you start, and what are you thinking? You're like, "Yes, so glad I did this, this is exactly what I thought it would be?" How was it for you?

Larry Perlman:

So, a few things: intellectually, it was more than I thought it would be. I mean, I am a law geek. I love what I do. I love the fact... and the way I put it: to me, the difference between intellectually what I did in medicine... and this would be different if I was a bench researcher, for example, or was running clinical trials... but as a primary care physician, intellectually, I felt that my problem-solving was focused on taking the really broad and finding one answer.

Larry Perlman:

If you have... I'm not going to give you a horrible condition, Alexis, so I'll just say if you have Condition A... if you have Condition A, that's what you have. I can treat it, but I can't go back in time and change that that's what your diagnosis is, so there's this answer out there, and my job as a diagnostician is to run a bunch of tests, evaluate you, examine you, and determine what the issue or issues are.

Larry Perlman:

What I love about, at least what I do in the context of how I work is, we're not dealing with nature in the practice of law. We're dealing with words. At the end of the day, we're dealing with words that men and women have decided have import, and we practice in that arena where there are words, the words have import, and we all buy into this social compact where we understand that those words on paper or on a screen now are going to guide what we do. Because of that, in any type of problem-solving, there are expansive solutions, right?

Larry Perlman:

So, what I mean is, if you go into any case... talk about litigation... you can make predictions. There is now way, and we say it to clients all the time... "I'd be lying if I told you we're going to prevail. I'd be lying if I told you we're not going to. I can give you my estimations. We can talk about risks and pros and cons of arguments. I don't know what the judge is going to do on summary judgment for sure, because there's no pre-ordained answer," and that's the beauty of it. I can use my intellectual capacities and our team's intellectual capacities to come to the answer and to find an answer, whereas if you have Disease A, that's not changing. We may treat it and solve it, but the fact of its existence... that answer is always there and is immutable. Something about the potential for multiple outcomes... it's why some people don't like lawyers, frankly.

Alexis Robertson:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Larry Perlman:

It's what I love in terms of the nimbleness of mind.

Alexis Robertson:

That's an amazing answer.

Larry Perlman:

But you asked about law school, right? We did a lot of that, and people say, "Well, Michigan, it's this theoretical law school and they're not teaching to the bar, and then when you go study for

the bar exam, you have to learn everything that's on it." That was just fine with me, because I loved all that exercise, and in class, and on the other hand... "What about this? But, perhaps this"... law school hypotheticals, I was eating those up.

Alexis Robertson:

Let's add another factor to what was going on in your life when you were in law school that I did not fully appreciate at the time. During our first set of exams... and in fairness, we started law school early so we had one less doctrinal class than you normally would; we started in summer, versus if you started in fall... your second child was born during exam, right?

Larry Perlman:

You kind of know this story, but the listeners don't. Here's what happened. So, I'm, I don't know, I'm 30 years old at the time, which I felt so ancient, by the way, meeting all of you young 20-somethings... and now I think how long ago that was... but I felt ancient being 10 years older than most of the class.

Larry Perlman:

At the time I'm applying to Michigan Law School for the summer starter program, which was kind of an early decision-type thing, we had a one-year-old, and Varisa said, "I'd like to have another child. You're applying to law school." I said, "Yeah, I'd like to have another child, too." I think our conversations were a little more substantive than that, but in any event, we're talking about expanding the size of our family, and I said, "Wait a second. There's a chance if you get pregnant now, I looked at the Michigan Law School finals and our child would be born right during Finals Week." Of course, Varisa said, "What are the odds of that happening?"

Larry Perlman:

Yeah, so, that's what happened. I went to Michigan Law School, I had that Finals Week, and we were expecting our son, Andre, to be born. He was supposed to be born... and it was TMI, but you asked, a scheduled C-section two days after the Contracts final. However, he ended up being born in between Torts and Contracts. Now, that kind of was horrible, right? But the good thing is, I think back and I really mean this... before that first semester of law school, I was a last minute student; so in med school, I would do the all-nighters. I would cram, and I got so frightened that first semester of law school. I'm like, "Oh my God, the law school finals are coming. Finals are everything. It's the whole grade. I might have a kid coming. I can't be studying."

Larry Perlman:

I became disciplined in a way I never had before. So, I start off that first semester... I mean, every day I had a schedule, and I was studying and I was reading and I was preparing, and it was the best habits ever because when he was born, for the first time in my life, it didn't even matter because I really was prepared.

Larry Perlman:

I still give him trouble about it, but yeah, that was pretty cool. It worked out.

Alexis Robertson:

Wow.

Larry Perlman:

I don't recommend it if you can avoid it, but...

Alexis Robertson:

That's really interesting what you said about changing your study habits, because yes, the Larry Perlman I recall did seem to always be on a schedule, and it had a good effect on me because I was like, "Oh, this person who has practiced medicine, just had a job in another life force"... yes, I went straight through. I had like two weeks off between undergraduate and law school, and I was like, "I'm going to adopt those study habits." It looks like you and a few other people really treated it as a job, and partly, in retrospect, I know you had to because you also had these other demands in life that you needed to be able to be present for. So, that's interesting that you really had to change your approach to studying.

Alexis Robertson:

Then also, I only reflected on this, maybe, oh, I don't know, right around when I had children... I recall talking to you, and later talking to Varisa, and going, "Wait, hold on. You had two very young children during law school." At the time, it didn't occur to me that that would have been difficult. I remember you being like, "Yeah, my wife had a baby," and I was like, "That's cool. See you Monday," having no understanding of the change that was happening in your life.

Larry Perlman:

Yeah. So, what it does... circumstances sometimes force you into good habits, and that's what it is, because, look, it's a heavy lift to ask a family to support you through school. I was contributing financially, so we suddenly go from a net really nice amount... I don't know if you remember, the first two weeks of law school I still had my lease to the BMW, and I had to give up because I was a student again.

Alexis Robertson:
I remember.

Larry Perlman:
That was the toughest part. Don't tell anyone. Well, I guess the whole world knows, but that was the toughest part.

Larry Perlman:
So, we go from this one lifestyle to trying to make it work as students, and on top of that, we have young children, and so it's a real sacrifice. It's a sacrifice to ask everyone else; to ask my spouse, to ask my children, as young as they are, to support me through this. So, if I'm not going to do everything I can to make sure that I'm present for my family, that's not cool. You're all sacrificing so much for me. I don't have the luxury of saying, "Well, but I'm a student, and I didn't study all semester, and next week is the finals, so you're not going to see me." That's disrespecting them, it's disrespecting their sacrifice.

Larry Perlman:
So, I sort of guilted myself into being a responsible person who, even after that first semester, tried to compartmentalize, and what I did best, and I say this... part of it is, when I went to undergraduate and even medical school, to the extent I could, I was young and I was interested in making friends and partying and doing all kinds of stuff besides being a student, and because I was older, I didn't have that other stuff that was distracting me, so I really had the focus of, this is a 9:00 to 5:00 job, a 9:00 to 6:00 job; I have three hours of class a day; I will do everything I can to get things completed by 5:00. I would never study at home; that was my secret. I would stay out. I would do all my studying out, and when I was home, I was home, and it worked well.

Alexis Robertson:
Thank you so much for elaborating on that, but we will move forward. Talk to me about Foley & Lardner. How does it come on the scene? How did you end up working for Foley?

Larry Perlman:
So, at the time... and it's funny, because I ended up moving to Miami eventually, which is a whole other story... but my 1L year, I did a internship with the Eastern District of Michigan federal judge. The next year, I went through the OCR process, and again, I like practicing law. I think it would make sense to practice law for one of the large firms. Foley... honestly, at the time, and I believe now, was, by far, the best reputation firm that had a footprint in Detroit. The Detroit office was relatively new, but I still knew of Foley. I went through OCR, I interviewed

everywhere, and I told myself over and over again, "Well, you're not going to do something just based on reputation and prestige. That would be silly."

Larry Perlman:

Fortunately, I went to my callback interview, and I remember interviewing with the folks at Foley, and what was amazing to me in the Detroit office, and this has held throughout my career for the most part at Foley... every person I met was a complete geek about the area of law they practiced. I remember John Birmingham, my first mentor, he was one of the people... he was the employment law chair at the time he interviewed me... I think that interview is what made me want to go into employment law.

Larry Perlman:

I remember, there's another now-retired partner, Sal Barbatano... he interviewed me. I asked him questions. This guy is talking about bankruptcy... I mean, he almost convinced me to go into bankruptcy law. I couldn't imagine a human being could have so much passion for bankruptcy, no offense to my good friends who do bankruptcy. You all do a good job of following your passion in law.

Larry Perlman:

So, I came out of my interviews... and I remember the others, too, I interviewed with... saying, "Wow, these people really enjoy what they do. They're engaged. I'm not Pollyanna-ish. I know there will be days that are horrible and that I'm miserable, but I want the weeks and months to be good, and I, Larry, especially want the weeks and months to be engaging, because the whole reason I'm changing careers is because I want to be engaged."

Larry Perlman:

At Foley, again, I did not... I mean, in terms of engagement in the work being done, the Foley folks I met during those interviews, during my summer with Foley, and in the ensuing, I don't know 13 years, 14 years... I would say our level of engagement with our work is unparalleled. We like being attorneys. We like what we do, and given my path, there's nothing more important than that.

Alexis Robertson:

Now, tell me more about labor employment. You mentioned that it was that interview that potentially is what sparked your interest, but why are you a labor and employment lawyer?

Larry Perlman:

The reason I'm a labor and employment lawyer is because there are parts of my old life, my old professional life, that I miss, and if I did certain types of law, I wouldn't get to scratch that itch, let's say. What it was... you may recall about 20 minutes ago, I said what I liked about practicing medicine was that I dealt with people, right? People would confide in me, and I would meet people from all walks of life, and we'd sit and we'd talk and we'd figure out what's going on with their life, and I love that aspect. I love talking to human beings and just getting their stories. It was the science that I didn't love, or getting the pus on my tie, right?

Larry Perlman:

So, with labor and employment, I realized there's this discipline where I get my intellectual curiosity satisfied, and I could geek out for hours about the types of things I work on, and what interests me, and how the McDonnell-Douglas framework of discrimination cases is just such a fascinating way of looking at things, and blah blah blah, and you'll glaze over and I won't. But on top of all that, when people ask me what I do, when laypeople ask me what I do, I don't have to explain anything that's complicated. It's easy. I say, "Oh, I represent employers and I assist with issues that come up with employees. If it goes to court, I help defend cases, cases that employees bring regarding the company, and I spend tons of time counseling and giving advice, and assisting, and collaborating regarding what to do with people who are in a workplace, and that's the best thing ever, because every day, I'm dealing with stories, stories of just regular people who are at work and something happens one way or another."

Larry Perlman:

It's our client's job to evaluate what that something was; whether that something was proper or improper; whether there's something that, as the employer, we need to do... and it's, frankly, just a lot of fun. So, that's why I do employment law.

Alexis Robertson:

Thank you so much for elaborating on that, and then I just have to reflect for a few moments, because as someone who's your friend and known you since law school, I've gotten to watch and just learn through you about your path at Foley, and it definitely played a role in me joining the firm in this role, because yes, I was a summer associate at the firm, but really, seeing your passion for the firm has meant a lot to me over the years, and I think it's a large reason why we're sitting here doing this podcast today... but then also, the things you reflected about your own professional transition and switching careers, which is essentially what I did; I stayed in the same industry, but I have switched careers, in that I'm not a practicing lawyer anymore, was that when I was making that professional pivot, you provided me a lot of really great advice, which were things that you had personally done, right?

Alexis Robertson:

You had done that soul-searching, you had made that scary step of changing something professionally. Fortunately, I did not have to go back to three years of graduate school to do it, but your insight there was invaluable. So, I do get people... and now I've been at Foley for, what, I think about nine months... who will ask me, "Why did you make the change," and you are definitely a part of that story because there's just things I was able to glean about the firm that you just kind of can't glean from just the website, and I think you really succinctly highlighted so many of them, which is great.

Alexis Robertson:

But with that all being said, we are getting close to our time, and something I do at the end of these shows is I like to ask people for their advice or their reflections... another crazy, wide open-ended question. But for you, I'm not sure if your preference would be to provide advice to that 17-year-old who thought being a doctor sounded really cool on what the next 20-plus years of his career were going to look like, or perhaps to law students daunted at the idea of attending law school. But what are your professional reflections you'd like to share?

Larry Perlman:

The question caught me off guard, but fortunately, I have answers; I always do, right? My answer is going to be abstract. I think the best professional advice I could give... thinking back on my path, thinking back as that 17-year-old who didn't really know what I want to do with my life or where I was going, is take time to do absolutely nothing every week, and I mean absolutely nothing. People say, "You're crazy," right? What does that mean?

Larry Perlman:

If you came to my apartment... well, you've been here, but if you came on a Saturday morning or a Sunday morning, I spend an hour or two every morning on the weekends, and I do the same thing, a half hour every morning, and I just sit in my [inaudible 00:40:13] and I have a great view of the beach, and I think. That's all I do. I listen to music sometimes, but I just think and I reflect. I wouldn't call it meditation. I don't understand formal meditation, but I let all those thoughts that I have turning in my mind come to the forefront. I have no agenda. I just sit there, and I force myself... again, it could be several times a week... to say, "What are you doing? What are you doing in life?"

Larry Perlman:

I articulate the questions to myself. "Are you happy? Are you engaged? Are you doing what should be doing, and if not, why not?" I'm not kidding you. I ask myself those questions on a regular basis. I don't do it loud because I have neighbors and the terraces are close, and that

would be weird, but I do answer myself, also, and to me, that's the key. You don't have to do it the way I do. You need to take time. We're busy. I was an internal medicine resident. I worked 100 hours a week regularly. I did not take the time to say, "Why am I here and what am I doing?"

Larry Perlman:

If you're somewhere that you shouldn't be, where you don't belong, your work is never going to be... not to mention your personal satisfaction and your sense of self, but your work is not going to be as good as it should, so it's imperative to take that time. Do nothing. Be alone with your thoughts, and think about those big issues... the issues that little kids ask, right? Why are we here, and what's the meaning of life? Why am I here? What's the meaning of my life? Am I okay? I don't know if anyone will listen, but it's worked for me.

Alexis Robertson:

That is amazing advice. It's profound advice, and I think that, along with so many other things you've said, have made it really clear why I wanted you to be my moot court partner, because in Legal Writing, there was a point where we were arguing against each other, and I definitely had this moment of, if you can't beat them, join them... so it was like, "Maybe he will be my partner," because you're one of the smartest people I know.

Larry Perlman:

The funny thing is, I thought... my memory is that I wanted you to be my partner, so I guess it worked out if we both were of a single mind there.

Larry Perlman:

The funny thing is, I had the similar feeling. I had the same, if we can't beat them, join them feeling.

Alexis Robertson:

So funny. Larry, thank you so much for taking the time to be on the show. If somebody had questions for you, wanted to reach out, is it okay if they find you on Foley's website, send you an email?

Larry Perlman:

Yeah, I think it's okay. I think they'll realize just from listening that I like to talk and I have no problem doing so. I welcome it, and please, please, please find me on the website, or call me, or email me, or text me, or whatever, and I will share my thoughts.

Alexis Robertson:

You heard it first. Feel free to reach out to Larry Perlman, or should I say Dr. Larry Perlman, Esquire? It's how we're ending it, Larry.

Larry Perlman:

That sounds fine. Thank you so much, Alexis. I really did enjoy the opportunity to share my path.

Alexis Robertson:

Thanks.

Alexis Robertson:

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.

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