

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 in 24 offices 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 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 and Lardner. 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.

Alexis Robertson:

Today, I'm speaking with Vaitiari Rodriguez. Vaitiari is an Associate in Foley's Miami office, where she focuses on immigration law. In this discussion, Vaitiari, shares about growing up in Havana, Cuba, coming to the US at 17, and the ensuing culture shock. She also shares a really funny story about a part-time job she had shortly after coming to the US, where I will fully admit, I was super close to losing my composure. Fortunately, I was able to maintain it, and to then get Vaitiari to share about how she decided on college, what made her decide she wanted to go to law school, and ultimately, how it was she ended up in the Immigration Group at Foley and Lardner. I hope you enjoy our discussion.

Alexis Robertson:

Hi, Vaitiari. Welcome to the podcast.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

My pleasure to be here with you today. I'm very happy and excited about all the questions that you're going to ask me.

Alexis Robertson:

Oh my gosh. Okay. I'm looking forward to jumping in, but before we get into the particulars of your life, I like to have guests start by giving the professional introduction that they give, or that you would give, if you are at say, a networking event, and someone asked you, "Tell me about yourself?"

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

Absolutely. I'm an Immigration Attorney at Foley & Lardner, and I do investment and basis immigration, mostly for companies, multinational companies, and high net worth individuals. So we are in charge of bringing their CEOs, their specialized knowledge workers, their

management to the US, and establish new businesses, opening new companies, that type of business and investment immigration that's not very known in the US as the other side of our immigration system, I would say.

Alexis Robertson:

Perfect, thank you so much. We're going to unpack that in a bit, and I'm actually going to ask if you can state your full name, because I don't know that the listeners appreciate just how terrible my accent is, and I just really want people to know how to correctly pronounce your name, because I don't have the ability to do it [inaudible 00:02:53], so please.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

It's okay. I will pronounce in my best Cuban accent, my Tahitian name. It's Vaitiari Rodriguez. Vaitiari, if you say it in like I say, Cuban Spanish, but no, you did a great job.

Alexis Robertson:

Okay. Thank you so much. I appreciate that. Well, let's start at the beginning. You just mentioned Cuba or Cuban, but let's start with where did you grow up? Where were you raised?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

I was born and raised in Havana, Cuba, and I moved to the States when I was 17 years old, oh my God. And I moved to California, I actually lived a year in Orange County, and then I moved to Berkeley for undergrad and law school. So I would say I'm a Cuban by way of California, and then now I'm in Miami because all Cubans end up in Miami at some point in their life, and my family's here and I wanted to feel again a little bit more connected and closer with Cuban culture in Miami. It's like a bit of a North Cuba, I call it sometimes.

Alexis Robertson:

North Cuba, that's really funny. And I'm going to take you back, because I think you just explained the last, actually your entire life in about a minute or two. So let's start with you came to the US at 17, and you were in Havana before that. What was it like growing up in Havana?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

Oh my God, it's very difficult to explain, especially to any Americans, how it is to live in a communist country because it's like living in another planet. I have to be honest, I had a happy childhood, but I think it was mainly because of my family, and I think they created sort of a protective bubble around me so I wouldn't have to suffer and endure most of the hardships of communism, and they always made sure that whatever they taught you at school, it's not the reality. There's books, there's ways to find that information so you can make up your own mind.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

So I was privileged in that sense that I had my family protecting you, but it's a different environment. Things that you give for granted in the States, like access to internet and information, being able to choose your own career, what are you going to be in the future? How many careers are you going to have? Are you going to be an attorney, and a doctor? Like we have some of our colleagues are attorneys and doctors. And I think the main aspect that impacted me when I moved to the United States, it was freedom. I was just so free to choose who I wanted to be, and how I was going to live my life, and I never felt that I had that freedom in Cuba. My life felt scripted.

Alexis Robertson:

There's so many things I want to ask about that, and I guess just to pick one of them, do you have a sense of say, had you stayed, because you were practically an adult at 17, you're closing in on 18, not far from 21, do you know what you would have done professionally by chance, had you stayed?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

Yes, I was actually, I applied and I accepted to El Instituto Superior de Arte, which is an art school in Havana, and I was supposed to be studying film and to be production and direction, that sort of field. So very far from what I do right now as an attorney, it was a 360, a 180 degree.

Alexis Robertson:

What caused you, and I'm guessing your family, why did you guys move?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

Well, it was basically just a family reunification case. My family, most of it left Cuba in the 1960s, so there was very few of us left behind. And then my mom, she got sick, she got a stroke. She's fine right now, but it was a very scary situation because I was in Cuba. I was 17 years old there practically alone with my mom. My neighbors are being my family because I don't have anybody around. And I think at that point was when my family that was living in the state says, no, you have to come and live with us. And then they file a petition. They, where US citizens, they file a petition for family reunification. And that's how I ended up in the United States.

Alexis Robertson:

And then what happens? You get here at 17.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

Oh my God. You know what you say? When I tell people like I left Cuba when I was 17, the reaction that I get is your reaction. Like, Oh, you were an adult. But I feel like-

Alexis Robertson:
Not really.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:
I was a child. I feel like my life could be divided into before I left Cuba and after I left Cuba. I always joke around and I say that I have two birthdays. The day I was actually born. And then the day I came to the United States, I sort of celebrated like on another anniversary.

Alexis Robertson:
What was the date? Do you remember that date? What day was it?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:
Oh, yes absolutely. February 17, 2007.

Alexis Robertson:
Wow. Okay. Keep going though. Keep going. You were describing about the significance of that. It's like your second birthday.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:
Yes. I mean I have memories of my childhood in Cuba and of course my, like I would say a big part, a significant part of my identity is I'm Cuban. But then I come to the States and I joke around and I say to people like, if you send me back to Cuba right now, I wouldn't know how to live and be there because I only know how to be an American adult quotation marks, because this is how my friends, my family, the way that you interpret and react to the world, and society as you know, it's just very mainstream American. I mean, I was joking around the other day with my partner. We were having dinner and I think we were having like mashed potatoes and broccoli and something like very American. And it's like, it's so funny because it's like, I can't cook Cuban food. This is why you're going have.

Alexis Robertson:
I'm laughing because I had mashed potatoes and broccoli with my dinner last night. There was a protein present, but the sides were mashed potatoes and broccoli.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:
Something like that. Yes.

Alexis Robertson:

Well, what you were saying about coming over at 17, I think that's a really important reflection because I think when I hear that, it means you probably have a strong memory. You know, 17, 18 is old enough to really remember something well, but I think for most of us who now find ourselves potentially into your thirties, forties and beyond, you look back and you do realize that at 17, you were still a child, even though you didn't feel like a child at 17. And I know you mentioned this before, but remind me when you did come to the US at 17, where did you go?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

Well, my family, they were probably the only Cubans in California. When they came from Cuba they settled in Orange County. So I live in Orange County around a year before I went away to college to Berkeley. So it was quite of a culture shock because you're going to California to a place that's, you know, very suburban, very middle-class, upper middle class in many ways, very American too. And here I am like the girl from Cuba just landed in Orange County is suburban. So it was a bit of a culture shock.

Alexis Robertson:

So from Havana, Cuba, straight to Orange County, California, I actually want you to tell me more about the culture shock. Like, I want some examples, let's do this.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

Oh gosh, let me... I mean, it's my life and I don't necessarily usually analyze it like that. But for example, something very funny, and this has to do with Latin culture. Like in Cuba, and I think it's, I don't want to generalize, but I think it would be the same. You wouldn't go out for example, to the market if you were not dressed, like you comb yourself, you're dressed very nicely. You smell good. Like you're going to present your best self up for the world. And it was very funny that I was at the market and it was around Christmas time. And I would see people with PJ's at the market. I was like, Oh, these Americans they're like very laid back.

Alexis Robertson:

So casual, we're so casual.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

And then at some point too, I remember... Havana it's not a very multicultural society because Cuba has always been very close to the world. And I remember being again at a market, magical things happen at markets apparently, and I was shopping around. And then this lady comes and she's like, "Oh, you're Greek. Like your family's Greek." And she starts talking to me

in Greek and I'm like, no, no, no, no. You know, I'm Cuban. I know Spanish. That's what I'm supposed to know. And then she's went away talking in Greek, like my parents were not doing a good job or something because they supposedly they should've taught me Greek. So it was just things like that. And it was sort of like a funny introduction to another way of life. And there's people from all over the world in the United States.

Alexis Robertson:

So yet, you weren't used to being mistaken for a different ethnicity or heritage.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

Oh my God. Yes. All the time.

Alexis Robertson:

I have now... It's different because I obviously grew up, I grew up in the US, but I grew up in the Midwest. I grew up right outside Milwaukee, but I went to college in Washington DC, and there's a lot more recent African immigrants in the DC area or on the East coast than there are in the Midwest. And so when I first got to DC, I would frequently not just get asked, but get told that I was Ethiopian. Told and spoken to in Amharic and I could not respond. And the person was like, why, what is wrong with you? And eventually I would say, "I'm not, I'm American." And I would get asked, "Well, where are your parents from?" And I would say South Carolina, and we just... But it was the first time that I'd experienced that. And so it's a bit different because you'd also just come straight from Cuba. But similar when someone tells you who you are or. who you should be. And you're just like, no, that's not the case.

Alexis Robertson:

Although I do want to ask, I know you mentioned, so you were in orange County for a year before going to Berkeley. Were you in school for that year or had you essentially finished school in Cuba?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

No, I couldn't. I left Cuba and I just finished high school. So that year was the year that I... When I came in, I'm an immigration attorney. I can explain it. There's like the Cuban adjustment act. So at that time, when you're a Cuban, you have certain privileges and what they give you is they give you sort of like an asylee type of status. So you have your work permit, you have her social security. And then after the year, you're applied to adjust your status and become a permanent resident. And then after five years you can become a US citizen. So at that time with my status of a refugee, asylee I couldn't go to college, because then I will not be able to apply for financial aid and get scholarships and will have to pay like international student type tuition that I couldn't

afford at the moment. So I have to spend a year sort of in preparation to college, applying to the universities, working so I could save money for college and like buy my first car and learning to drive all that type of things.

Alexis Robertson:

And so that's what you did. You spent a year getting prepared, working in Orange County I'm assuming. Can I ask, where did you work in that year?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

Do you know when you go to Costco and there's a sample lady?

Alexis Robertson:

Yes.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

I was one of them.

Alexis Robertson:

Really?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

But not at Costco. This was this market called Fresh and Easy that, it I think an English company called Tesco if I recall correctly.

Alexis Robertson:

I think that that rings the bell. That sounds right.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

Try to open a market in the US, like sort of imitated Trader Joe's, but yeah, it was a great place to work. And I was a sample lady. I have to say that I was not a very good sample lady. I ate more of the samples that I gave away, and I was way too sincere because if people ask me like, "Oh, is this good?" And it was not good. I was like, "No, don't buy it."

Alexis Robertson:

This is the best thing ever. You can see my face. I've tried so hard not to just laugh hysterically. I was not a good sample. Meanwhile, someone's like, "Hey, can I have a sample?" And you're like, "No don't. It's not good. Get that one over there."

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

That was basically me. So I was very polarizing. I have my following of like elderly ladies that will come and ask me questions because I was the honest one.

Alexis Robertson:

Because you are trustworthy. This is amazing. I could take this podcast in entirely different direction and it's taking a lot of willpower for me not to, but I am deeply grateful that I asked you that question and that you answered. Thank you so much. All right. So eventually you go to Berkeley. How did you decide on Berkeley or was it decided for you?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

I wouldn't say it was decided for me, but I know that my success has always been built upon the shoulders of many, many people that helped me. Not only my personal desire to succeed and how hard I work. There were many, many people around me. So a lot of people suggested that I try for Berkeley because in California, it has a tremendous reputation and they also thought that it was going to be a good fit because you know, it's socially diverse campus. I think they thought like, you're going to get a quality education. You're going to get also, you're going to be educated in terms of like, who you meet. You're going to meet so many people around you diverse. You're going to feel... I think it was also in a way, like it's a safe environment for you to be, since you're sort of new to the States, you go to a campus where there's many people that look like you too. So I think that was part of the equation. Yeah.

Alexis Robertson:

Did you know that you wanted to go on to law school that early on?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

Oh my God, no. First I was intending to be a business major, but you know, it was just not for me. And then I did some soul searching and I realized that political science was something that I wanted to do. And I intended to pursue a career in political science because I mean, growing up in Cuba, the word politics is like thrown around you. It's part of your life. You cannot separate it. So I thought, okay, this is going to be my opportunity to understand the power behind politics and to understand the history of politics and know what international relations meant outside the Cuban universe or American politics, et cetera.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

So that's mainly why I decided to become a political science major. But then when I was in law school, I realized pursuing a PhD was not for me. I was not interested. I remembered that I realized I was always interested in doing human rights work and working with Cuba and human

rights, improving human rights conditions in Cuba. And I realized that I needed to have a voice. And for some reason, I don't know why becoming an attorney and being a female attorney, someone who could understand how things work and the law and that it's in and of itself, a figure of authority that people could listen to. I think it drove me to the idea of like, I want to become an attorney.

Alexis Robertson:

When was that? And it sounds like it was throughout college, but was there any sort of defining moment for you where you truly decided?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

Yes, there was this conference in Berkeley about Cuba and human rights and they invited a couple of professors and people from the Cuban government. I personally disagree with the people they invited, I think they were representing the Cuban government and they weren't given a fair picture of what was happening in Cuba. And they were overlooking the very real human rights violations that were happening. And that I think unbeknownst to the school, it was their best intention to provide a space for dialogue, but they were promoting what I would say were agents of the communist regime. And then I said to myself, I wish I could be able to stand in that scenario and talk to people and that people would listen to me. And I think that idea clicked in my mind as I was seated, listening to the conference.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

And the word attorney, just like, came to me. Like, attorney. And then I did, it was like, how do I become an attorney? Because I have no idea. I knew how you will become an attorney in Cuba, but I don't know what it meant in the United States. Like, do I need to apply to a different school after I'm done with my undergrad? What's the process. So at that point, I think I was in, I think I was a year away from finishing college when I have that revelation. And then, yeah, I decided to apply to law school

Alexis Robertson:

And you figured it out. I do like what you just said about, I knew how to be a lawyer or how to become a lawyer in Cuba, but I didn't know what the process was here in the States. And I think that's something that we often assume that everybody would just sort of know, right? But the case is, people don't. And so I do like that you just took the moment to share that, that you had to then go and be like, okay, what do I do now? How do I become a lawyer?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

I agree. It was an unknown for me. You know, I'm not the first person to go to the university in my family. My parents are doctors and I'm lucky in that sense that they always instilled the importance of education. And I saw them, I think I was very little when my dad was like finishing his residency and I would remember him with his big medical books. Like I grew up in an environment where education was something that you would seek, but then I'm here. I basically landed in the United States and I've done everything on my own.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

It's like, how do I find a way to become an attorney? Because a lot of us don't know and, thank God for internet. I always tell people like, when you don't know something, I mean, it's very basic, but just Google it. Think about the schools that you want to go, ask around and never be afraid of going and asking to your professors. I mean, if people don't want to talk to you, okay, that's a no, you got to no for an answer. But most of the time, especially in that type of academic setting, people want to help you out.

Alexis Robertson:

Absolutely. Well, and it's so true. What you just said about we are now so fortunate that most of us in the US have access to the internet and that you can just Google it. And often we forget just the power of information at our fingertips where you might think, Oh, I need to go find a lawyer and ask a lawyer how they became a lawyer, but now you can just search it. Just search for it. And that might sound so obvious, but that actually comes up, I think a lot in life where someone's like, but I didn't know how, and you're like just Google "email marketing" or whatever it may be.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

Yeah. And you know what? It was funny because the librarians at school were my friends. Sometimes it was like, "I don't know how to do these. Can you please help me?" And I don't know if they took pity on me because they saw this like poor Cuban girl asking around, but you know, you always have to be brave. You never be afraid to ask around and ask for help. And if it means that you have to be vulnerable and say, I don't know how to do it. So you just have to, someone's going to help you. Or even if somebody doesn't help you, you'll get there because you're pushing above and beyond what a lot of people do.

Alexis Robertson:

That's so powerful what you just said. There's no improving on that. And what I would like to do now is talk about the process of you deciding which law school and which law school you went to. But I did briefly first want to ask you, how was the college experience for you given that you basically went from Cuba to college in California? How was that?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

So different. School's so different. In Cuba, there's a lot of emphasis and like, they basically give you like tons of books and you memorize and that's how you learn. And here again, I said, I had a lot of freedom, and I have also a lot of freedom in terms of like, how many classes do I want to take? How many degrees I want to pursue? I think at first it was a little bit intimidating because here I was, I was at Berkeley and everybody around me, I was always in all of my classmates because people could be more laid back or less laid back, but they were all so brilliant. And it was like, I'm here sitting with this people who are brilliant, who I could say, they know the system, they grew up in the States, they feel comfortable about it.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

But I think overall it was a great experience because it taught me how strong I could be because English was my second language. I mean, I've been studying English in Cuba ever since I was eight years old. So it was not that I came to the States without knowing how to read and write in English. So was a plus for me, but I understood the way I wrote in English, an essay for class. It required more effort on my part than it would do for someone who's, you know, English is their first language, for example. So it told me that I needed to work extra hard just to get to a level where probably my classmates were very comfortable just by the fact of being born in the States. But I think it was very beneficial for me.

Alexis Robertson:

How did you pick law school and where did you go to law school?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

I went to law school at Berkeley. So it was basically just like walking a couple of more feet from my classes to the law school. I love my experience at Berkeley law, but now, with experience and in hindsight, I think I should have applied to more schools, especially schools in the East coast. I think the only two schools that I applied in the East coast was Georgetown, because I love Washington DC. And I did get accepted, so it was a very tough choice. And Cornell because a friend of mine wanted to go there.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

But I think I mainly applied to schools in California because I wanted to remain local at that point. I think it was more of a question of like economics, like moving to another state. It means that I have to find a job or like my partner at the time had to find a job, how much more expensive it was going to be, I was already living in a rent controlled apartment in Berkeley, which is like gold.

Alexis Robertson:
Absolutely.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:
So there was a lot of that. And I think that was mainly the aspect that made me decide to stay in California for law school

Alexis Robertson:
Makes a lot of sense and it is not free to move across the country. So I definitely could understand that decision-making. But you start law school, how was that for you?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:
Oh, I loved it. I know a lot of people are sort of traumatized by law school and I get it, but I have a great experience because I remember sitting in my law school classes and it was the first time in my mind that I thought, "Oh my God, this is applicable. I'm learning something that's applicable to the real world. This is not more theories and hypotheticals about something that may or may not happen. This is applicable. Someone could go to Yale or abortion rights could be decided one way or another."

Vaitiari Rodriguez:
So I had a great experience. Berkeley is I think it's a very humane law school. I don't know how it is in other places. I don't want to be disrespectful with anybody's choice of law school, but I think it's a very humane place for law school. It's not that we're not competitive. It's not that it's not rigorous. It's just that we choose to not let law school define who we are in a way.

Alexis Robertson:
It sounds like a good culture.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:
Yeah. It's a good culture.

Alexis Robertson:
Did you know while in law school that immigration law was the focus or was the focus still on that human rights component?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

It was a lot in the human rights component. And immigration law, it's not something that is taught in many law schools.

Alexis Robertson:

You're exactly right. Yes.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

Yeah. Especially what I do. And I think they have an immigration class, Berkeley when I was taking, when I was there, but he was more on a theoretical type of aspects of immigration law, not like the nitty gritty that we do. I was more interested and involved with human rights. I was part of the human rights clinic at Berkeley. I think I was like a senior of the clinic because every semester I would say like, "Can I stay, can I stay?" Because I loved it. And I love Professor Fleischer who runs the clinic. And then I did work during one of my summers at the World Bank doing anti-corruption work, which I love. I was elated with the experience of like trying to persecute people who take phones that are meant for development in third world countries and going after them.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

So that was my fun law school experience. So it was definitely more about human rights. To be honest, I knew that I was in the second year when we go to OCI, I knew that I was going to end up at a law firm, because I figured that was the place. You know, it makes sense in terms of paying your loans, et cetera, et cetera. But I think it also makes sense in that law firms are probably one of the few places that are willing to teach you.

Alexis Robertson:

The training. They train you. Yes.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

When they train you when you're new out of law school. So that is something that people overlook a lot of times, because there's a lot of myths about law firms and what they are and what they're not, but they do offer very good training when you're young. And believe me, law school, it's great, but it doesn't teach you to be an attorney.

Alexis Robertson:

That's exactly right. And it's interesting because you said you realized, "Wow, a lot of this is applicable," but it can be applicable but still not, like you said, teach you the nitty gritty of how to draft that document or how to file whatever you're going to file. So when does Foley and Lardner come onto the scene?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

I was interviewing for OCI and I don't recall her name, but it's a [inaudible 00:28:54] in LA. And I think I owe a lot to that lady, which I will find the name. So please, if you're listening to me, don't get upset. But I went to interview and I was interviewing with Foley and Lardner and I immediately sort of fell in love because it was such a, it was a laid back environment, but it was always like, I used the word humane to define who Foley is as a law firm. And I think it's a very humane place. And I think I clicked with a partner and that partner looked at me and say like, "Hmm, I think you will be good fit for the Miami office." But I didn't think anything about it. I was like, okay. And then I think two days after that I get a phone call from Sarah Kostelnik and she was telling me like, "Hey, do you want to come from like a callback interview in Miami?" And I was like "Yes. Do I go right now?"

Alexis Robertson:

I'm on my way.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

I'm on my way. So that's how I got to be in Foley Miami. It was a little bit of luck, I guess.

Alexis Robertson:

That's awesome. And also Sarah Kostelnik organized my summer associate program in Chicago. So I probably got the same call at some point because I was at Foley my one hell summer. But you make the leap, you go to Miami. When do you start focusing on your current practice area? How did that happen?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

It's also happenstance. A lot of my career has been defined just by being probably at the right place at the right moment. I was working in Miami and I was supposed to be a litigation associate and I was doing great. And then someone mentioned like, "Oh, you should go and work with Roy Barket." We joke around in the Miami office. And we say like, there's two sides to the office. One is like the litigation side. And then the other department is the immigration side. I was like "Why don't you go to the immigration side and see if you want to work with Roy." And then I started working with Roy. I really liked him as a partner. I thought that he had the qualities to be a good mentor. I fell in love with his team, the secretaries, Alicia [inaudible 00:30:59]. And I really liked the work because I felt probably for the first time in my career that everything that I perceive as a flaw sometimes like being from another country, not being American, having gone through an immigrant experience, was actually applause and asset.

Alexis Robertson:

It's a super power now within your practice area.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

It is. So I felt like, "Oh, this feels very comfortable," but I didn't think anything of it. I went ahead and I thought I was going to be a litigation associate. And I was actually very happy with being a litigation associate. And then I got a phone call. I think I took my bar exam or I was about to take my bar exam, I don't recall, from my partner, Roy Barket, And he asked me if I wanted to join his team, his immigration team. And that's how I ended up in the immigration department.

Alexis Robertson:

I have to reflect on the journey you just shared because I think for most people, and that's why I really do hope we get a number of law students who listen to this podcast, particularly your episode. You think that you have to have it all figured out. You think that it at 18 years old or 24 years old, and you look ahead and you look at people who are doing what at least what you think you want to do. And you're like, they probably had it figured out. And it's not until you sit and you hear the stories of how one thing led to another, but then interestingly, in retrospect, it was all those experiences that allowed you to be so fantastic at what you currently do. So just what was it maybe 15 minutes ago when you said, "Well, now I know why I had to wait that year because this had to be done in this time to be done."

Alexis Robertson:

Right? You also now know how people feel when they're even, maybe in that situation. So I just, I never tire of that story. That's literally why I needed to do this podcast because I never tire of hearing how things just end up working out. It makes me really excited. But you gave us a bit about your practice earlier. Can we dig into that again?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

Of course.

Alexis Robertson:

Can you once again, I'll have you break it down a bit, just so that it becomes kind of really clear what you're focused.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

Okay. I think the American public specially nearing the last four years, when they hear about immigration, they think about asylum. They think about ICE taking families apart. They think about deportation. And I mean, it's not that we don't do that. We have done pro bono cases with

that type of the protection cases, political asylum cases, but it's not the bread and butter of what we do. We do the other side of immigration and the American public does not know or understands now.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

I think now with the latest presidential proclamations, there's a bit of more of awareness of what it means, you know, a H Visa or and L Visa or, you know, an F student. So what we do is we focus on that investment type visas, non-immigrant type of visas too. We do a little bit of family reunification. So our main clients tend to be multinational corporations. I want to bring their employees to the United States, or they want to open a business in the United States. There's also some high net worth individuals that can obviously pay our law firm fees, and they want to set up a business. There's a lot of private, especially in Miami. There's a lot of private wealth that runs part of the year. You know, the economic underbelly of the city in a way. It's a very Latin-American very European city. So we also cater to service those individuals who usually wants to open business in the United States.

Alexis Robertson:

I appreciate that explanation because not only does it explain, like you said, some things that people don't already know, but as you know, I'm relatively new to the firm. So you're also educating me, which I really, really appreciate. And I also do think that a lot of people in terms of immigration, the first impression is just, "Oh my gosh, that is so complicated." And so it's, I think interesting to have someone like you, who's an expert, explain at least what one side of that can look like the side that we don't talk about as much.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

No, we don't talk about it. And I think it's very important to talk about it because now seeing... And I don't want to get political and it's not political, we're just talking about policy that's happening in our country right now. Like now with everything that's happening lately restricting more and more immigration. We could see that it's very important to pay attention why these type of employees may or may not take American jobs, why this type of investment it's important in certain regions of the US. How does it really looks like, facts? And I think there's a lot that can be learned from my practice area.

Alexis Robertson:

That's so interesting. I really, once again, I keep saying that I appreciate you for sharing that, but I truly do, because it's just insight. Like you said, that we don't think about very often. We're getting closer to the end of our time together. And I mentioned this to you earlier, before we jumped on the podcast, but I also want to get a combination of whether it be reflections or

advice back to the... If there is that law student listening, and maybe one way to consider it as if you had to give advice to your 17, 18 year old self who had a bunch of stuff ahead of her to navigate, what would your advice be if she... Say you knew at 17 that law was where you were going to end up, what would you tell her to keep her motivated?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

I think I would say be patient. It's very hard to be patient when you're young and you want to already know all the answers and you tend to think that the path to success is a straight line, and it's not. It's never a straight line. And I think life will teach you that. So be open, be flexible, because you are the tendency when you're young to think the path to success is a straight line. You're very, sometimes you're not very flexible to new opportunities. And because I was, I said yes to many of the new opportunities in my life, I am in the position that I am right now.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

So be patient, be open, be flexible, work hard. And if you're thinking that you're not working hard enough, or that you're working enough to make it, double it. That would be my advice. And I think it, it doesn't matter who you are, where you come from. If you're a Cuban girl like me, or if you were born in, in the Midwest or from a comfortable middle class family or you're African-American, it doesn't matter who you are. There's a lot of strength in your own identity and knowing yourself.

Alexis Robertson:

Oh my goodness, as a diversity and inclusion professional, you saying there's a lot of strength in your identity just like hit me directly in my heart. That was perfect. Thank you so much. There's I don't think there's a better way to end other than just asking if someone would like to get in touch with you, what's the best way for them to find you?

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

Well, they could go to the Foley website and there's my email and my phone number. I think my email is the best way to contact me, especially right now that we're working from home and I tend to be very responsive to emails. So do you know if you are law students out there or you're just a student or you're just trying to figure out if you want to go to law school or if this profession is for you, just shoot me an email. I love to talk to you, 20 minutes, half an hour, whatever you want and just like, listen to you.

Alexis Robertson:

Thank you so much by Vaitiari. I hope people take you up on that offer. And thank you for joining me today on the Path and the Practice.

Vaitiari Rodriguez:

No, my pleasure to be here with you.

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 as 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 and 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 and 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 is it intended to convey civic legal advice.