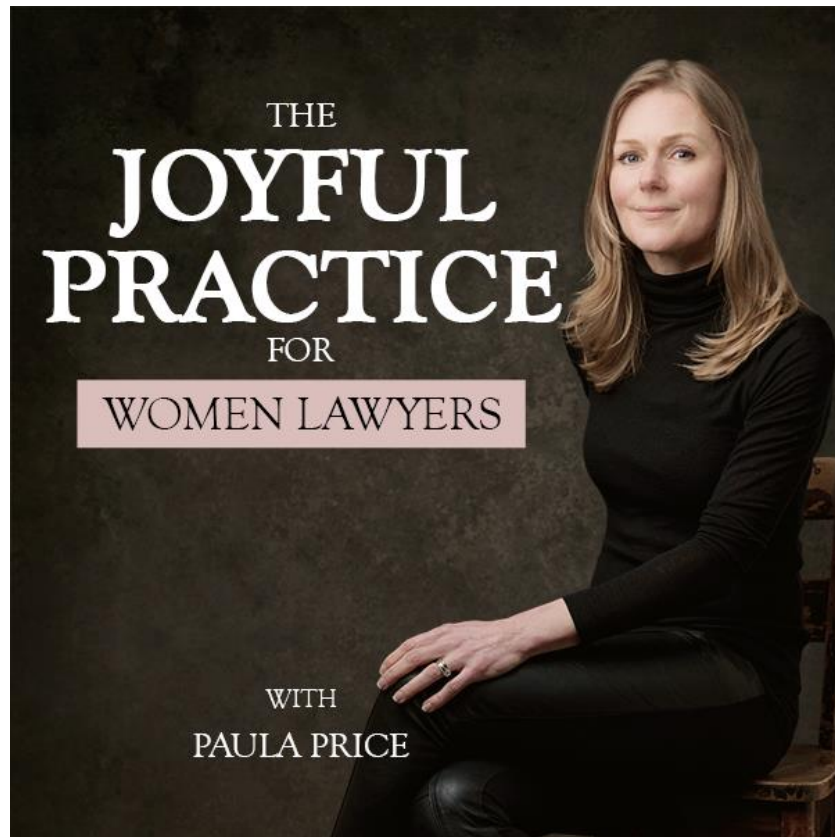


Ep #58: Lawyer to Lawyer Coach: Five Years, Five Lessons



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Paula Price

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You're listening to *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* Podcast episode number 58.

Welcome to *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* Podcast. I'm your host Paula Price, lawyer turned certified executive coach. This podcast was created to empower women lawyers just like you to create a life and practice you love. Join me every week for a break from the hustle so we can focus on you, what you truly want, and how you can create it.

If you're over the overwhelm, done with putting out fires, and ready to create a life and practice that brings you more joy, you're in the right place. Ready for today's episode? Let's dive in.

Hello my friends. Welcome back to the podcast. How are you doing? I hope wherever you are you are having a fabulous week. If you're not having a fabulous week, that is okay too. I can tell you this week has been a bit of a doozy. I'm recording this podcast episode kind of shaking my head. I had planned on this being one of those super productive weeks. My kids get out of school next week, and so had planned everything this week.

As luck would have it, my daughter fell ill. So we've had her home. We've had her brother home. What was going to be this quiet, tranquil oasis of me getting work done has become something entirely different. It's a bit of a throwback to the early days of the pandemic where I'm working and trying to keep the kids occupied and engaged. Sometimes, I mean they did spend some time outside, but there's been more screentime than I'm super comfortable with. So the mom guilt is coming up. For all you parents out there, you can relate I'm sure.

So here I am recording this episode with my kids on the screens and really happy to connect with you. Also just really feeling a sense of wanting to acknowledge how sometimes no matter what kind of plans we set up for

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ourselves, those plans change. Having that grace with ourselves, having that grace with everyone around us sometimes that is so important and yet so hard to do.

So if you are watching your emails pile up or you're in a similar position to me, your kids are kind of falling all over you and you're trying to get your work done. I'm with you, my friend. We are in this together, and we are going to get through it.

So anyways, this week, I didn't want to complain about all the things that are going on here. Although thank you for listening. I appreciate it. What I wanted to talk to you about was a bit of a milestone in my professional work and how it relates to you. So I'm about to turn 45 in a few days. It's a bit of a milestone birthday for me because it marks five years since I decided to move away from traditional legal practice and start my coaching practice.

So around this time five years ago, I submitted my application to Royal Rose to do the executive coaching program. I think I may have even been accepted by this point. So the wheels were turning. The actions were being put into place. Here we are five years later. From that I have stories to tell based on my own personal experience, based on my own professional transformation, and also the transformation, the work that I've been doing with lawyers who have come to work with me to help them navigate challenges and opportunities that they've had in their practice.

So what I want to share with you today is five lessons that I've learned over the past five years. These are lessons that I think are key lessons. They are not the only lessons. I don't think I could do a single podcast that really covers everything that's gone over the past five years, but these are the highlights of what I think are important to keep in mind when you are building your practice and as you're thinking about where you want to go when you're being intentional about creating a practice that you really love.

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So with that, I want to start with number one, which is being intentional in the relationships that you're building. So as we go through these lessons, I would invite you to think about your practice. Where you were five years ago, what that looked like, what was challenging to you, what is now not challenging for you, what you have on the horizon, what the next five years are going to look like.

So if you look at this first one, relationships, I would invite you to think about what value you're placing on your professional relationships currently. What I've noticed watching lawyers evolve over the years, watching how their practices transform. What I have noticed is that those who turn out to be the most successful, and I gather and I know success is subjective, but those who seem most delighted, most fulfilled, most engaged in the work that they do tend to have a strong network of relationships.

I think building relationships or “networking”, I put it in air quotes, sometimes gets a bad rap. I think often you may associate networking with wine and cheese, cocktail events where you have a stack of business cards and you make small talk and you walk away feeling kind of like you had, I don't know, salesy conversations that you weren't all that crazy about. I don't think that building relationships has to be anything like that.

To me, building relationships with likeminded professionals is one of the most amazing things that you can do within your professional work. Those relationships can become lifelong friends that are not just professional friends, they are your personal friends.

So what I would recommend to all of you is to take an inventory. It doesn't have to be formal. You can just kind of go through it in your head, but are you being intentional about the relationships that you're building. If not, maybe it's a good time to start doing that.

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I think for a lot of young lawyers especially, there can be this idea that to be successful all you need to really do is put your head down and produce excellent work. It's true. Producing excellent legal work and developing your legal skills, those are strategies, those are actions that are going to result in you being able to build a successful practice.

But what that doesn't cover is the fact that relationships are really the glue that allow you to work within an existing framework. It's what will cushion you and support you as you move through your work. Relationships are important, not just as sources of work. They are important sources of work, the lawyers that you work with within your organization, colleagues who refer files to you, internal clients, external clients. They are all the source of you being able to master your craft, to do the work that you want to do.

But those are not the only relationships that really matter. There are mentoring relationships. There are colleague relationships. There are friendships. There are those who you mentor. There's the team that you build to help you, the lawyers who you delegate work to, the support who helps you run your practice. So focusing on the relationships and building them with intention, I think, is one of the key ways for you to develop your practice.

This applies not only for simply building a practice, but also for any transitions that you would like to make within your practice. So maybe you're seeking a promotion within your organization. Having the support of colleagues, having the support of more senior members of your firm or organization is essential to you being able to move forward.

If you're looking to transition into another organization, being able to establish relationships with those outside of your organization is also key for learning about what opportunities are available to you and what it's like

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to work in a different area and to show yourself as somebody who would potentially be a valuable addition to another team.

Professional relationships are also key for finding fulfillment in your work. So your firm, your organization, has a number of amazing individuals who you can connect with and learn with and grow with and same with your clients. But there's another area. That is the professional contacts that you have purely for the love of what you're doing.

Whether that means it's an aspect of your practice, maybe these are friends who are in your industry, and you have a really strong bond or a shared common interest. Maybe it's something that is not law related, but it means a lot to you and it has real value for you to be spending your time on a board or volunteering. Those relationships as well are what are going to add richness and joy to your practice.

So, my friends, tip number one is what I've seen, what I've witnessed for myself, and what I've witnessed for the lawyers that I've worked with is that relationships are really essential. Often when lawyers come to me, they have found themselves in a place where I guess the state of their relationships is almost incomplete. It's almost like there's a few gaps there that they need to fill.

Almost always there's some work that needs to be done there to start reaching out to be intentional to start creating those relationships that will complement the practice and lead to opportunities and lead to more fulfillment. So my friends that is step one.

Lesson number two. This lesson is one that probably will not surprise you. As you are thinking about the relationships that you have within your professional work, I would invite you to make a priority out of one relationship in particular. That is the relationship you have with yourself.

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So I think as advocates, we are really good at stepping into the shoes of our client, fighting for our clients, making sure that we're doing the best possible job, putting ourselves out there, staying as late as we need to stay, taking on everything that we possibly can, not taking a break, not necessarily asking for what we want. At the end of all that, I would ask you whether that is getting you to where you want to go.

Now, there's nothing wrong with doing any of those things. I highly encourage you to go after the things that you want and to work hard if that's what you choose to do. But I would invite you to think about what that would look like if you flipped around the relationship so that you were putting yourself first.

It might help if we look at professional athletes. If you look at elite athletes they are, I have in my mind's eye those really buff runners who are really chiseled. They're super well taken care of. They take care of themselves. They get massages. They train. They take care of their nutrition. They rest, and you are no different. I mean you might be an athlete. You may be training for something.

But the nature of your work is using your abilities, your mental capabilities, your brain, your mind, your reasoning, your judgment to make a living. This is such an important part of the value that you're contributing to your organization and to society. Yet, how much are you actively taking care of yourself in the same way that an elite athlete is taking care of themselves?

So what might that look like? I would start by questioning what self-care looks like in your world. I think for many of us self-care can feel like it's an indulgence that we are not allowed to have. We have to work. We have to earn it. We don't deserve it, whatever. If you have that approach, then I would invite you to consider that self-care may be exactly what you need to

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perform better, to be more productive, to be able to serve at a higher capacity.

Another area that I'd invite you to look at your relationship with yourself is in the context of self-trust. So you may find that sometimes you are meaning to do one thing, and then you almost negotiate against yourself so you're not actually doing that thing.

So an easy example might be you've got a brief that you're writing or an email you need to draft, and you've set aside a couple of hours in your schedule. It's something that's a bit weighty. It's going to require some research, gathering some documents, whatever.

You sit down to write it and you think this is like the last thing I feel like doing. So wait a sec, there's an email. I really should respond to that email first. Oh, wait a minute, I also want to make sure that that filing went through. Wait a second, I think my brother might have emailed me about that dinner that's happening in a couple of weeks. I better make sure that I respond. Next thing you know instead of having made an inroads to your assignment, the thing that you wanted to accomplish, you've now kept yourself busy, but you haven't been truly productive.

The challenge there is that you are eroding that sense of trust that you have with yourself. You can imagine if you had somebody that you were working with, a colleague or an assistant, and you ask them can you spend the next two hours drafting this memo, and they filled up their time doing busy tasks. You would not necessarily feel all that trusting to invite them to take on another project. Yet we do this to ourselves. So I would invite you to think about what self-trust looks like to you, and how you might start building up that trust with yourself.

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Another area where I think we really want to focus on the relationship that we have with herself is self-confidence. So knowing that whatever happens, we are going to be okay. That is something that comes with time. But the sooner you can find that belief in yourself, that belief that things may not always go your way, but you'll always have your own back. You'll always make it through.

You will always land on your feet somehow is, again, an ingredient to having a relationship with yourself where you feel good in your own shoes. I'm not sure what... There's a French expression, *bien dans sa peau*. You feel good in your skin. That's really what I'm after here.

So going back, we have two lessons so far. One is building your relationships externally within your organization, outside of your organization, weaving together that social fabric that is going to carry you professionally. Then second of all is really honing in on your relationship with yourself. That will have a spillover effect in the relationships that you have with others, and how you feel day to day in your practice.

So the third lesson that I'd like to share with you is one that I would invite you to consider in your own context. This is the lesson. Excellence and distinction are unique to you. So when you're starting out, when you are mid-career, you may look at other lawyers, you may look at other professionals, and you may see in them something that you want for yourself. Chances are you're not looking at any single one person and saying that is the life, practice, everything that I want. Chances are you are looking around, and there are bits and pieces that resonate with you.

By all means, I invite you to do that work. In fact, if you haven't done that work, I would encourage you to do that work. Because what you'll find is things that you see in others that resonate with you are clues about where you will find your own zone of genius, how you can distinguish yourself

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professionally. So yes, you can look to others and their success as examples of what may be possible.

However, what I would invite you to do is to really focus in on what makes you unique. What do you do better than anybody else? Watch for the breadcrumbs that you have in the history of your practice. What have you done really well? What do people give you compliments for? What are some of the comments that your clients have given you?

When have you worked on something and you felt so good about it? Conversely, what is it that you do not enjoy? Where have you felt like you're not all that strong? Is this an area that you want to improve on or is it an area that you are not interested in pursuing? What riles you up?

There's just work that gets you excited, right? You see the file, and you just can't wait to jump in whether it's a procedural matter, whether it's substantive, whether it's you get to work with your favorite lawyer, your favorite client, your favorite project, whatever that might be. I mean, there's work that you're probably really excited to get into. Then there's probably that work here it kind of arrives and you kind of let it linger, and you reluctantly acknowledge it, all that.

Also, what makes you angry? So chances are if it has the potential or the capacity to make you feel quite emotionally charged, it's something that you truly care about. So what I'm going to invite you to do here is instead of trying to fit in along with everybody else, it is to separate yourself from the pack. It is to identify what it is that is unique to you. How is the experience of working with you different from the experience of working with anybody else? If you can lean into that, that is how you can set yourself apart. How you can distinguish yourself professionally.

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Number four, discomfort is your greatest guide. Now, this particular tip is probably a bit annoying because nobody really wants to go around looking for uncomfortable situations so that they can learn and grow. Right? I mean sometimes you might. I have to say I've had a journaling practice where there are days where I will literally write down today I am willing to face the discomfort to do X.

When you invite discomfort, it can absolutely be a tool for rapid growth. Because to overcome that discomfort, you need to develop new skills. You need to overcome obstacles. You need to understand what it is that makes something uncomfortable. You can imagine setting boundaries and anticipating that you're going to say no to somebody and they're going to be upset with you or you're going to disappoint them. You're going to miss out on a chance to help somebody. Discomfort is such a great teacher.

So what I would invite you to do is to think about areas in your practice where maybe you're shying away because it's uncomfortable. You can do that, but if you truly want to grow, if you truly want to build a practice where you feel confident and you feel like you could do anything, you need to be willing to put yourself in that position where you're going to be uncomfortable.

You're going to risk failure. You're going to risk the judgment of others, and you're going to prove to yourself that you can do that. Whether or not you win or lose, fail, succeed, that you're going to come out on the other side of that, and going back to point two, you will have that relationship with yourself intact. It will be in integrity. That you will have followed through on something that you can be proud of regardless of the outcome.

So one last note in relation to discomfort. As you put yourself in those positions, right, as you're coaching yourself and persuading yourself to take on that file that is scary and you're gonna have to learn everything new and

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you're going to be working with a client you've never worked before. You're going to be pushing yourself out of your comfort zone. I would encourage you to do so in a way that is kind to yourself.

You may have reached the level of success that you currently have by pushing yourself, by almost having, I think I spoke about it in the last episode, but that drill sergeant approach where you're kind of forcing yourself and almost beating yourself up and pushing.

What I'd invite you to do is to really try as much as possible to act from a place of compassion, right? Adopt that growth mindset where you're looking at the challenge as an opportunity to learn, where you're kind to yourself, where you're forgiving of any mistakes that you might make along the way and giving yourself that pat on the back that you dared to even try it at all. So yes, go and seek the discomfort. Yes, take action and move into the discomfort. Absolutely do so from a position of really looking out for yourself as opposed to forcing or chiding yourself into doing it.

Number five is it is all a practice. So your work is not static. You are not static. Your life is not static. If you look at your life five years ago and you look at your life today, and if you look at your life five years from now, it's constantly changing, and that's a good thing. One of the things that I love about this work is that it is a practice.

If you look at your relationships, for example, they are evolving and growing over time. It's not like you have one interaction and that's it, you call it a day. What's really amazing is when those relationships can evolve, when those relationships become deeper, when you're able to learn at a greater level, when you can support others, when they can support you.

So number one, it is a practice. Look at how you've invested in yourself and are you accountable to yourself. So again, maybe trusting yourself and

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putting yourself first isn't something that you're used to. So as you do it, you may really struggle. You'll have days where it's an utter fail. You take on too much. You don't get the care that you need. You go to sleep late. You don't eat well, et cetera, whatever. You don't need to use that as an excuse to stop trying. It just means that we need to recalibrate.

So for all of these areas, whether it's time management, whether it's the nature of your work, whether it's the relationships that you have, it's giving yourself that grace to continue to adjust and move forward. I would also invite you to look at the mentors and the examples that you're learning from and see how your path is unique relative to theirs, and to really distinguish yourself from the crowd.

Finally, I would invite you to think about what was challenging to you five years ago that no longer fazes you, right? The practice that you have, it evolves over time, and you get better at it the more that you do it. So the more that you step into uncomfortable situations, the more you reach out and start building relationships with other lawyers and with colleagues and with clients and with people who are completely outside of your industry but who you find really interesting, that will become more natural to you.

What you will find is that every time you reach a new level, there will be new challenges that present. I mean it's almost like you're playing a video game. So right now I don't know what level you're on. You could be on level one. You could be on level 20. You could be somewhere in between. You're going to get to the end of that level. There's going to be a big scary monster. You're going to figure out how to overcome that big scary monster. Then you're going to go up to the next level, and there's going to be a whole new set of rules to get used to, new challenges to face. That is part of the fun.

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This happens with your time. You think that you've got a hold on your time. Then we have a pandemic and everything gets turned upside down. Or you think that you're going to have a week in your home office that's going to be quiet, and you're going to get all your emails and admin taken care of. Then the kids are sick, right? These things happen.

Knowing that if instead of resisting the change, you are able to find a way to celebrate it. I mean that, to me, is true mastery. I'm still working on that in many areas of my life. Areas where I can see it, right. Sometimes you may resist. You may fight it. You know that if you can work your way from resistance to allowing to loving to accepting to celebrating that that is where you become unphasable. You become unstoppable, and it's something that we can all work towards.

So that is what I have for you, my friends, five years into my coaching practice. These are really high level concepts, but I think that they are relatable to all of us. Number one, focusing on building the relationships that you have in your professional and personal life. Number two, really focusing on establishing a good relationship with yourself. One of trust, one of self-confidence, one of self-care.

Number three, excelling and allowing yourself to distinguish yourself based on your own unique profile of strengths and interests. Number four, using discomfort as your guide. Allowing yourself to jump into situations that are really challenging because they are exactly what are going to help you grow. Then finally accepting that all of it is a practice. That we can perfect something and then things are going to change. We are constantly getting to that next level of the video game.

So with that I'm going to wrap up today. There was one last thing I wanted to share with you. It's kind of sweet. I was out with my daughter the other day. We were walking around the block. We do this sometimes after dinner.

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It's a beautiful time of year. There's a ton of flowers in our neighborhood. So we kind of go from plant to plant smelling these gorgeous flowers.

I offered to her that she lead the way. Usually I lead the way. I made that offer to her, and she said that okay, I'll do it. She said, "Mom, you know the neighborhood, right? Like is it possible that we could ever get lost?" I said no, I know my way around. It doesn't matter where you take us. We can go anywhere. I'll be able to find the way home. She was so excited.

I asked her. I was like well what does that mean to you? She's like, "That's so great mom because that means I can have an adventure. I can do whatever I want." She was so excited when she said this. It made me think of the way that we approach our professional careers. If we know that at the end of the day, we are always going to get home, then what risks, what adventures, what opportunities are we going to seize knowing that the outcome is going to be a good one.

So I'm going to leave you with that. I will look forward to reconnecting with you next week. For all of you, thank you again for joining. Thank you for everyone who has reached out to me, for all the lawyers I've had the privilege of working with. This truly is work that I love. I'm so glad that it has been possible for me. So I appreciate you. Thank you, and excited to do this work with you. Bye for now.

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