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PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

SCOPE OF PRACTICE

THE PRACTICE CHOOSES THE PRACTITIONER


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Yoni Levy: Hi, and welcome to *Scope of Practice*, a Ropes & Gray podcast series for U.S. law students. In this podcast, we'll take an inside look into different practice groups and the life of attorneys in those groups here at Ropes & Gray. I'm Yoni Levy, a partner in our asset management group based in Boston. On this episode, I'm joined by Ani-Rae Lovell, an associate in our litigation & enforcement group in New York, and by Christina Ravelo, an associate in our award-winning health care group in D.C., fresh off of winning health care and life sciences "Practice of the Year" by *The American Lawyer* for 2022. Hi, Christina and Ani-Rae—it's great to have you on. Why don't we start with a bit of background about yourself, your practice group, and how it was that you landed in that practice group? Christina, why don't we start with you?

Christina Ravelo: I'm in the health care practice group. I won't take us through the entire saga of how I ended up in this practice group, but I guess the takeaway is I wasn't exactly sure of what practice group I wanted to be in at all when I was in law school. And so during my summer, we got a note asking if anyone wanted to split their summer with business restructuring, so I actually spent my summer doing life sciences and business restructuring. It turned out that the business restructuring group was on the same floor as health care. I didn't really know what they did. I didn't know what that practice looked like, even though most of my family is actually in health care. I wasn't exactly sure what that meant, and so I really did have to learn from everyone else there, socializing during the summer, during coffees, during the lunches, and really got to learn that the practice group totally makes sense to me.

Yoni Levy: Great, thanks. What about you, Ani-Rae?

Ani-Rae Lovell: I never considered joining a corporate group at any law firm. And sometimes, when law students ask me how I chose litigation, I feel like I didn't do enough legwork to choose between corporate and litigation. I was really into moot court in law school and debate in high school and college, so I just ruled out anything but litigation when I was looking at joining a law firm. I also stumbled into my more specific focuses within litigation. I split my time from year to year pretty evenly between restructuring litigation, so with the bankruptcy folks that Christina split her summer with, as well as corporate and commercial litigation—so, between those two groups. I had no idea what bankruptcy was when I was in law school. I didn't take bankruptcy when I was in law school, and I happened to have a summer advisor who was in the midst of a bankruptcy case when I was a summer associate. I spent some time helping him and the team out. It just so happened that a case was still going on when I returned to the firm as a first-year, and so that was how I started working on restructuring litigation specifically, and really enjoyed the people and the fast-paced nature of the work. So, I continue to do a fair amount of restructuring litigation within our broad-based litigation practice.

Yoni Levy: That's great. I think that really highlights for the corporate folks why we choose corporate work, because you don't tend to leave the firm, go back, finish law school and come back, and corporate projects are still going on. But I think it's different for litigators who can feel really attached to their projects, that it's nice to watch their baby grow up, and maybe by the time they're 10 or 15, they're ready to move out of the house and resolve.

Ani-Rae Lovell: Yes. I don't want to scare anyone—there are matters that move a lot more quickly, and typically the bankruptcy matters are the more fast-paced matters. So, by no means does it mean that you join the litigation practice, and you're tethered to matters for years on end. But sometimes that happens.

Yoni Levy: I also love that both you and Christina touched on bankruptcy work. One of you stuck it out, and the other one decided, "This is not for me." Christina, maybe you could tell us a little bit more about, as someone who walked through a few different practice groups in trying to find your way within the corporate department, what was it about health care, in particular, that attracted you to that group over some of the other groups you experienced?

Christina Ravelo: I think that one aspect of it is just the culture of the group. I really got along with the people that are in the health care group, and I just felt like it was a really good personality fit for me. The group, like the rest of Ropes & Gray honestly, strives for excellence, likes to get in the weeds on things, and produces excellent work. So, I think a big part of it was, although I said that I knew that I wanted to go into the corporate department, I still had that lingering feeling that I didn't know if it was correct that I wanted to do more transactional work. And so something that I like about the health care group is that it's more of a regulatory practice, like our life sciences practice too. So, while it sits in the corporate department, the actual group itself will do anything from transactions to litigation to regulatory compliance work, and I like the fact that I could actually just try different things still within the same group. I do get the experiences of working with our litigation teams—I work with our PE folks, STG, all the different practice groups we work with in the health care group—and so I like that I get to work with everyone all over the firm and still get to have a pretty broad practice, even to this day.

Yoni Levy: That's fascinating. Can you tell us a bit about some of the types of projects you work on then, in each of those categories? What does a typical project look like in a litigation-focused health care project versus transaction-focused and versus regulatory-focused?

Christina Ravelo: For the litigation side, it might be anything from working on a False Claims Act case that our litigation teams will be working on—they might be working with the health care group and have them on as specialists for the litigation. So, we'll be supporting our litigation folks who might be thinking more so about litigation strategy behind it and working with the government, but we might be doing more of the research side of things, in which we'll be looking into the actual statutes, the regs, what it means in the health care industry—providing a little bit more of the specialist services there. At the same time, we could also have our own litigation cases and enforcement-type cases coming from within the health care group, so that might change a little bit. And then in terms of compliance, I think this goes a lot to our fraud and abuse work that we might do.

There is also the regulatory side of things, and so, more of this might be helping build compliance programs for different health care industries. So, it might mean we're thinking about behavioral health, for example, and we might tick through all the different types of laws that could be potentially triggered by a behavioral health company. We'll build a compliance program for them in terms of building out policies, or maybe they have a discrete question. I think some of the more interesting ones that we receive are, "We are innovating, and we're thinking about a new way to do X. We want to build out this program in this way. What are the problems?" And it becomes more of an issue-spotting type of exercise, and then working with the business teams in order to create what that would look like in a compliant way and thinking about all the health care laws that could be potentially triggered. So, it's really interesting.

Then, in our transactional work—again, there's a very broad spectrum here, but I think typically where we might land is on the private equity side, in which case our private equity teams at Ropes & Gray, they will have a health care team if it's a health care-based company that's trying to be acquired. And we will do all the health care-based diligence and also help them think through potentially the structure of the deal and what that looks like.

Yoni Levy: Great. And then do people within the health care group tend to focus on one of these branches, or it's really everyone in health care has a mix of work in each of these types of work?

Christina Ravelo: I would say the first few years are definitely a mix. I think associates are still figuring out exactly the type of work that they want to do. I would say, as you become more senior, I think people start shuffling into certain areas that they want to work on. They could also be where they're shuffling into those certain areas in terms of subject-area expertise. So, the dividing line might not be litigation versus transactional versus regulatory—it might just be, "I really like the clinical research space, and so I'm going to be the clinical research subject matter expert." Or "I really enjoy reimbursement-type of work, and so I'm going to become that subject matter expert." And I think at the same time, people might have multiple of those aspects.

Yoni Levy: Do people typically have a technical background of any sort?

Christina Ravelo: I will say that most of the people that are in the group have at least some sort of public health bachelor's or health epidemiology-based background. Maybe a couple folks with master's of public health. Some are also doctors or might have a Ph.D.

Yoni Levy: Just one more question, and then I want to flip over to Ani-Rae too, but you mentioned that on the transactional side, our clients might be private equity firms focusing on acquisitions of some sort of health care-oriented company. In the other projects, do we tend to work for hospitals, startups with medical devices—what types of clients do we have?

Christina Ravelo: Yes, we have the private equity side, in which case sometimes the companies are being acquired by our clients. Our private equity clients might also become our clients, and they might further on want to do more acquisitions, so we might actually be doing some smaller transactions with some of the portfolio companies of the private equity clients. But we also do academic medical center transactions, in which we are working with transactions between public and private entities most of the time—it's at least what I've seen in the group. Again, I've been here four years, so I'm sure that there's more to dig in there, but in that case, it might just be more affiliations, joint ventures, and how hospitals work possibly with private entities in order to start innovating in health care.

Yoni Levy: Great. Ani-Rae, I feel like you're set up with a difficult task here, which is following up that interesting set of responses from Christina, but can you give us a sense of at least what your practice looks like within the litigation group, what types of projects you work on and who your typical client looks like?

Ani-Rae Lovell: Definitely. It's really interesting to hear Christina talk about being a subject matter specialist—seeing a broad base of types of matters, but all having that kernel or focus on health care. Because I think in my practice, and for a lot of the group, we're not particularly subject matter specialists—we might instead specialize in types of litigations. And I use the word "specialty" not in a really narrow focus, but maybe have more experience in or more of our practice is focused on working with regulators, for instance. That's not something I do, but there's a huge portion of the litigation & enforcement group that does that enforcement piece, working with the SEC and with the DOJ. Or others in our group focus on the court or the types of courts that we may work in. Some folks really focus on arbitrations or others in the Court of Chancery, which is the major corporate litigation venue in Delaware. For those who aren't as familiar, most major companies and corporations in the United States are incorporated in Delaware—Delaware has the most robust set of laws that govern corporations, companies, LLCs and the like, so there's a whole group of people who focus their work there. It's interesting to see or hear the differences in Christina's practice focusing on a subject matter, whereas we see all sorts of different subject matters.

My clients in my time here have ranged from major media companies, oil and gas companies, and athletic brands to our private equity clients, of course, and it's really been across the spectrum. Even within those industries, we sometimes work on behalf of directors and officers specifically, and sometimes we work for the companies themselves. It really is a broad-based practice, and within those clients and within those industries, our matters are also across the spectrum, because they can be at various different stages. So, when you join a case, it might be pre-litigation. We might be drafting demand letters on behalf of our clients who are owed money from a transaction or contract that they entered into. Or you could be filing a case—or sometimes, more likely, being on the receiving end of a case that's filed, and be filing a motion to dismiss. All the way through to discovery with depositions and document review to motion practice in trial, so it really does depend. And like I mentioned at the beginning, my practice has focused mostly on restructuring litigation—so, when disputes arise in bankruptcy proceedings, or at least distressed debt situations—and our commercial litigation practice, working on behalf of major corporations, and directors and officers in those corporations, when disputes arise.

Yoni Levy: Did something in particular cause you to want to focus on bankruptcy-type cases, or was that just by chance that it happened that way?

Ani-Rae Lovell: That was just by chance. It was the people I met at Ropes. And to Christina's point, a lot of where you end up, I think, can be guided by the people you meet and clicking with them. And I really just clicked with my summer advisor and the team that he had working on a bankruptcy case, and it snowballed from there. I kept picking up matters with those people and really enjoyed them. And then from there, I realized probably a year and a half in that I also really enjoyed the work. Restructuring litigation is really fast-paced—things need to happen quickly. This seems pretty intuitive, but for a company to be in a Chapter 11 proceeding for an extended period of time—ideally a company enters a restructuring, and restructures relatively quickly and gets back to the business it wants to be running, rather than dealing with a bankruptcy proceeding—so our litigations there tend to be really quick. And that doesn't just mean that you're burning the midnight oil—it means that important and exciting tasks get pushed down to more junior associates. So, all of the trials that I've been a part of to date were in bankruptcy courts. I went to trial as a first-year associate in bankruptcy, as well as, I think, as a second- and third-year. So, it meant getting really great experience very early on, and of course, that was really appealing to me.

Yoni Levy: Yes, I think people worry when I ask them on this podcast about how they wound up in their practice group, that they need to have some compelling narrative, but I actually think it's really helpful for law students to understand that there's tons of fields of practice, and within each of those areas, there's tons of sub-areas and types of different work that you could be doing. And a lot of times, it is just the right group finds you—you find the right group over the course of time. Does that mean that there's not a parallel universe in which I'm perfectly happy as a litigator? No, I could be happy as a litigator, but I found a practice group that works for me in asset management. And other people have found practice groups that work for them. There's plenty of intellectually stimulating work and interesting things to do in all of the fields. Law students worry a lot about closing doors and finding the right path for them. I would encourage people to explore things they're interested in, but not overly worry about it. I think both of your stories actually are good examples of how the right practice group finds you eventually, and you'll do the work that you want to do, so I think it's an important lesson anyway.

Ani-Rae Lovell: I couldn't agree more. I also think Ropes & Gray, especially the summer program, and as junior associates, really facilitates that. We're always open to and encouraging those folks to try tons of different kinds of matters and really take a broad-based approach, so they can find exactly what interests them the most, like you're suggesting.

Yoni Levy: You mentioned a little bit about different roles that you've played, even as a junior associate at any rate. Can you talk a little bit more about what people are doing at different levels of seniority in your practice group, what's the level of involvement of partners in all the projects, of more senior associates in all the projects, and how your role has evolved over time?

Ani-Rae Lovell: I would say, our most junior associates spend a lot of their time drafting and researching, which I think is a natural and helpful segue from what they're doing in law school. And they're also really in a role to fact development, so identifying key documents that we've collected, either from our clients that need to be produced in litigation or key documents that are produced to us from the opposing party. I think, as you become more of a mid-level associate, so after you've been at the firm a few years, you typically start to attend more calls with co-counsel and opposing parties. You start to manage the junior associates who are doing those more research- and document-heavy tasks, and reviewing their work. And then, I think that only amplifies more the longer you're here and the more senior you are, so rather than attending those calls and helping prep for those calls, you're leading those calls. You have a greater role in corresponding with clients, getting phone calls from clients, dealing with those issues, as well as developing strategy in the case. I think the more senior you are, you go from seeing a relatively narrow piece of every matter to really understanding the broader scope, the strategy of the matter as a whole, and developing longer-term relationships with clients, which obviously is really critical to understanding the business portion of a strategy as well and what it means for our clients to be in these litigations and what the best litigation outcomes are for our clients.

In terms of involvement of partners, I think it can range. Some matters are really small—sometimes it's just you and a partner, so obviously, you're interfacing directly with the partner day-to-day, and they're heavily involved. Sometimes it's much larger teams—large litigations require "a lot of bodies" as we say, to be engaging in all of those tasks. And so in those larger teams, if you're a more junior or mid-level associate, you may not be having as much direct contact with the partners on a day-to-day basis, but the partners are certainly involved in understanding what everybody's role is and providing feedback on all the work product.

Yoni Levy: That's great. It sounds pretty similar to my experience. How about you, Christina?

Christina Ravelo: Yes, I agree with Ani-Rae. I think for the juniors in the group, I just call it "always taking the first pass" is probably the easiest way for me to say it, given especially all the different types of work that our group does. It could look really different, depending both on the actual subject matter, the actual client, and like Ani-Rae said, the team itself. I think we can either have a really "stacked team" as I call it, where we're doing the classic junior, mid-level, senior associate, partner (maybe even more partners), to it just being it's your first year and you're doing a direct project with a partner from our group. It just depends on exactly what it is that's at issue, but I will say that most of the time it's just the juniors taking the first pass. I will say that on most of my matters, I usually ask for the juniors to take an initial look at things. Or if it's drafting a research email to a client, providing background on an anti-kickback statute law, it will be where I probably ask the junior associate to just take a first stab at it, and then from there, it's refined over time or addressing any questions.

I will say that now moving into the more mid-level senior role, there's much more client interaction. I think as a junior, I did have that client interaction, but I think that I was normally afraid of speaking to them. But I will say now as a mid-senior, I very much feel like it's my job to be the one to be organizing the matters, to be the one having those discussions with clients and really driving the matters forward, especially because now, I think it's more expected that I know exactly what the next steps are. Like Ani-Rae said, I think now I know what the entire system looks like for a certain matter, and I think that part of my job now is to be the one saying, "Okay, we just finished X. The whole team, we now have to do Y next." And really being the one thinking about those critical next steps and working with the partners on that.

In terms of partner interaction, I think the same thing as Ani-Rae said—I think it just depends on the matter that it is. I think there are just some matters where it might be that the associates are the ones really working out a lot of the kinks, and maybe a partner comes in for supervision before it's sent over to the client. But there are also the types that it's just on a daily basis I am working with a partner, and we're discussing exactly what to do every single day. It just depends.

Yoni Levy: Yes, "it depends" is the number one answer in a lawyer's playbook. You both mentioned a little bit about partners in your group and interactions there, but what about the overall culture of your group? How well-integrated do you feel into your group? What are mentorship roles and relationships like within the group, both formally and informally?

Christina Ravelo: I think something that I really love about my practice group, and by no way is it exclusive to my practice group, but I do feel like I'm very well integrated into the group, which was somewhat surprising to me—and I say that only because "surprising" in the sense of we are maybe about 100 attorneys. So, we're a pretty big group, and we are spread out throughout all of the U.S. offices—we have representation in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Boston, and D.C. And I think something that I really love about our group is just how good we are about working across offices. I think that it's never been a question of where you sit for certain projects. I might be on a deal where the partner sits in Boston, the senior associate's in L.A., the mid-level is in Chicago, and I'm sitting in D.C. as the junior associate in that case. And I think one way in which that's really helped is just how often it happens has really made it so that there are lots of people who I have now met but have just worked with exclusively from another office, which I think has been really nice. I think that something that my group does is that every single year, we actually get together for one dinner in which the entire group goes together to the Boston office. And we all actually get to meet with each other and have this really nice, formal celebration to recap the year together, and I think that that's always been a really nice way to make everyone feel like they're a part of the group and really integrated there.

Yoni Levy: Great, thanks. Ani-Rae, how about you?

Ani-Rae Lovell: I have to echo a lot of what Christina said about how cross-staffing means that you feel really integrated into the group. I started in our Boston office as a junior associate and moved to New York, and that transition was really seamless because we have major litigation presence in both the Boston office and the New York office. I had already worked with attorneys in both places, and so in a lot of ways, it didn't matter from a professional standpoint exactly what office I was sitting in. I think the pandemic only amplified that to a certain extent. I, in my own small way, am reaching out to our most junior associates now that we're back in the office and trying to get to know them and take them for coffee—I know a lot of various groups are trying to do that as well. I'm sure we'll talk about the Women's Forum later, but that's a great vehicle for getting to know others in your group as well as outside of your group.

The litigation department does a great job of integrating associates into the group and into the firm. I also think mentorship is really important in that way too. There are certainly formal mentorship opportunities—you're assigned a mentor when you're a junior associate—but informal mentorship is something that I've been blown away by during my time at the firm. I have a whole host of informal mentors that I have the opportunity to speak to about different things. I have mentors maybe that I really want to speak to about what types of litigation matters I should be focusing on next for my development versus some mentors that are more tuned into maybe external opportunities I should be seeking out to really develop as an attorney, and I think it's really important to have those mentors and advocates. And I think even at a more general level, the litigation group, and I'm sure other groups do this too, but if you have a question, people never hesitate to reach out to the full group and ask if someone's come across a certain type of situation, a certain type of legal question, or whether they know someone in a state we don't practice in, and folks are always willing to jump in and provide their input and mentorship in that way as well.

Yoni Levy: That's great—very interesting. And thanks for bringing up the Women's Forum—I know you're both members in the Ropes & Gray Women's Forum. Maybe you could talk a little bit more about what that experience has been like, what it means to be part of the Women's Forum, and give us a sense of your experiences with the Women's Forum. I'll start with you, Ani-Rae, since you brought it up.

Ani-Rae Lovell: The Women's Forum at Ropes & Gray is a long-standing group at the firm of female-identifying attorneys. It's both a broad group across the entire firm, as well as we have what we call "circles" of smaller groups of attorneys within certain offices, and sometimes further divided up into practice groups. So, for instance, in the New York office, we have a Women's Forum circle specifically in litigation. And the thinking there is, we want the circles to be small enough that the events that we host are truly opportunities to connect with others. But of course, we also host Women's Forum-wide events. We certainly have some excellent speakers come in and speak to the entire Women's Forum. More recently, we've been hosting something called "Women's Forum Quarterly Wednesdays," which are opportunities for folks to raise any issues they have, to workshop ideas about how to tackle maybe some difficult topics. So that's the Women's Forum in a nutshell—it's a platform for connection with other female attorneys, for workshops and events with other female attorneys, both truly substantive. Last year, we had a speaker come talk about "Harnessing Your Voice"—it was someone who specialized in how to best present yourself to others. And obviously, that's important for attorneys as a whole, but it had a unique angle and perspective for female attorneys. The Women's Forum is also for some fun and frivolous activities like champagne tastings, wreath making and the like. So, I'll pause there. Happy to answer more questions, but I also want to hear Christina's experience because we are not in the same circle, so we haven't had the opportunity to interact in that way before.

Christina Ravelo: I think that that was a great description of what the Women's Forum is like. I think even just seeing how excited we are to talk about the Women's Forum just shows how great it is. I think that it's a really special community that's been here long-standing before me, but being a part of it ever since I first came in has been a really special part of my time here at Ropes & Gray. In the D.C. office, we actually are a small enough of an office where we are just one circle for the entire D.C. office, and so I'm one of the circle leaders this year and part of a planning committee as the circle leader. There's a partner, Kellie Combs, who leads our circle, and there's four of us associates who help support all the initiatives of the Women's Forum. But most of it is honestly just getting to know all the female-identifying attorneys in our office and really getting to know what it is that they need in order to be successful here at Ropes & Gray. And so while we are circle leaders, we by no means are just doing things on our own—we take into account everything that everyone is talking about or has concerns about and really want to be there for them, and that might be something more formal in terms of the event planning that we actually do, in which, like Ani-Rae, we do frivolous. So tomorrow, for example, we're doing a wine garden happy hour, now that all of our first-year associates started. Luckily, it's a heated patio, because it is in the 30s here in D.C., which I don't think anyone was planning for. And then, we have an event that's actually about dressing for your brand, in which we have a fashion consultant coming just to give some tips into how you can actually find empowerment based on how you dress for work. And then, we might also have more professional development-type of panels—for example, we did some cross-office event with I believe it was Chicago, where we had a panel of Ropes & Gray alumni women who spoke about what their career paths were like and what ultimately led them to the roles in which they're at today. Most of them were GCs of certain companies, and we really got to learn about their path, what their development has looked like over the years and the tools that they have used in order to move their profession forward.

It really is a very multifaceted group, and I think it's really built upon both the actual leadership of the Women's Forum on the firm level. I think it's definitely a very important group for the firm, and we feel that as a group—I think that that has also helped empower everyone to feel like they have a stake in the group. And so really when we do these quarterly forums, when we do them both firmwide and also for our specific circles or our specific offices, we really get to know one another in the groups, and we really get to learn from one another. We find mentors within our Women's Forum circles who might not even be in our practice group, but have actually honestly helped change our lives while we've been here at Ropes. So, it's a really important group for us, and we feel really passionate about it.

Ani-Rae Lovell: I couldn't agree more with all of that. I think one thing I just want to emphasize or amplify is how serious I think people take the Forum—not in a serious/we don't want to have fun way, but I've been taken aback sometimes by how heartfelt and important the topics people will raise either with me individually as a circle leader or in some of these more broad forums. And the fact that they feel comfortable raising any sort of issue and that I think that action will be taken, for me, really speaks to the importance of the Forum and the good work that it does. And by "serious," I don't mean at all to suggest serious issues at the firm, but rather things that might be difficult for someone to balance in their practice. They're looking for guidance on what it looks like to be coming back into the office. Some of our most junior associates spent their first year-and-a-half or two years working from home, and they really wanted to discuss what it looks like to be heading into the office two to three days a week because that's just not a professional experience that they've had before. Or maybe someone is dealing with a health issue or the like, and they're looking for support and guidance on how to balance that with their career. And so I always am really moved and appreciate that people are willing to raise those issues and that we have a forum, for lack of a better word in this instance, in which to discuss them.

Yoni Levy: That's great. I love that Christina said that you can see that they're very excited about this. Unfortunately, you can all hear their voices, but I can see their faces, and I can tell you, when we got on this topic, they're both smiling ear to ear. Do you think that there are unique challenges facing female-identifying attorneys, and how is the Forum important in that sense?

Christina Ravelo: I can't say emphatically enough that there certainly are unique issues that female-identifying attorneys everywhere face, not just at this firm, but every firm—and not to take it even further afield, but in every profession and in every job. One of the things I think is most powerful about the Women's Forum is it's really hard to tackle feminism writ large or issues women face writ large, although we can all do what we can there, but to attempt to take it in a bite-sized chunk, which is what can we do for female-identifying attorneys at Ropes & Gray and sometimes even further, in New York, in litigation, at least, to me, is a productive and purposeful step forward. And so sometimes, those seemingly small issues about how the office, the firm or the group is handling something, does impact female-identifying associates or partners in a specific way, and so the Forum does enable us in the first instance to raise those issues. I've been surprised over time that I or others will raise something that others just didn't realize was something that was great or was difficult about a decision that was made or was being considered, so it provides an opportunity to raise it, which is always the first step. And then, to start to either workshop internally amongst our group or to start to identify the right resources, and I think that is certainly a positive step in the right direction for addressing any issues that are unique to female attorneys.

Yoni Levy: That was great—thanks for sharing that. Do either of you have any specific anecdotes of advice, support opportunities or something that came out of the Women's Forum, generally, or your circle, in particular, that speak to you?

Ani-Rae Lovell: I'm sure there are a million things that have happened that have impacted me in my trajectory at the firm. But very early on, after I moved to New York, I was at a meeting with Lisa Bebchick, who is a Women's Forum leader at the firmwide partner level, and she and I were getting to know each other. And she mentioned to me that it would be great if I could work on the junior board of an external organization, and that that would be a really great career development step for me. Having gotten to know Lisa, she ended up recommending me to the Pro Bono Advisory Council for the New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, which is what we call a "junior board" for the organization. Knowing that she was looking out for me, reached out to me, and wanted me to have an opportunity like that I think is a great example of the kinds of connection and mentorship that can come out of the Women's Forum and our circles.

Christina Ravelo: In the D.C. Women's Forum circle, there's actually a small offshoot that's called the "Women of Color Collective," in which it is under the Women's Forum umbrella, but is specifically for women of color—so, intersectional in that sense. And so while that is a part of the Women's Forum planning, it is planned a bit separate and might have more of a quarterly lunch together to really discuss issues that are relevant to women of color specifically. I'm also a part of the Ropes Multicultural Forum, which is firmwide for just generally having a multicultural background or for people of color. And then within there, there are subgroups that might be specific, and so I'm part of the Latinx affinity group under the Ropes Multicultural Forum, as well.

Yoni Levy: And your women's circle offshoot, it sounds like, is particularly meaningful to you?

Christina Ravelo: Yes—in the D.C. office, we have pretty good representation of women of color, both at the partnership level and the associate level, and so having that specific mentorship has been really important for me. There's actually a specific woman in the Women of Color Collective who's also in the Women's Forum—she's a partner, not in my group, but it happened to be that we were speaking at one of these events about how I had a client presentation coming up. And so the next day, she said, "We're going to coffee, and we're going to talk about this presentation." The whole time at coffee she said, "This is exactly what I do before I present to any client. I do X. I do Y. I do Z. You need to do this. You need to pretend and do this." She gave me an exact to-do list of exactly what I needed to do in order to have this client presentation. And so it was really successful, and having her tips was really helpful. I think that that's just a good example of where that intersectionality for the Women's Forum group is really important for me and my development here.

Yoni Levy: I think one of the things that's coming through in what you said and how you said Ropes & Gray is very serious about the women's circle really touches on why I personally chose the firm, why I chose to come to Ropes & Gray. I feel like the firm is full of very genuine people who actually care. It's a work environment—we do good work, we try to do good work—but ultimately, everyone here is still a human being and very genuinely interested in being good to each other and creating a good environment. So, that's part of why I chose the firm, but I'm curious to hear why you and Christina chose the firm. And maybe I'll start with Christina: What was it about Ropes & Gray that attracted you here, in particular?

Christina Ravelo: You hit it right on the head—I think my main reason that I chose Ropes & Gray was because I felt like it was a really genuine firm. I felt like everyone that I talked to during my interviews was completely being themselves. I think the way that one person said it who I interviewed with was that they felt that they could "put on rap in their offices and no one would judge them" was the exact anecdote that I was given, but I think that that's really true. I think everyone brings their own personality to it, and I think something that's so great is that Ropes & Gray makes you feel appreciated for bringing your personality to work. You might have a different perspective and you might have a different way of thinking about a project, about thinking about your interactions or anything like that, but I think it's always been open, appreciated and really genuine. And I have always felt like I could speak my mind, be myself, listen to my Cuban music in my office, and I think that that is the reason I chose Ropes & Gray.

Yoni Levy: Yes, as someone who sends no fewer than 15 memes in a day, I can definitely appreciate that. But maybe you could send me some of that Cuban music afterwards—I'm always looking for new things to jam out to in my office while I'm working.

Christina Ravelo: Will do.

Yoni Levy: Okay. How about you, Ani-Rae?

Ani-Rae Lovell: Yes, I feel like you both stole my script from all my interviews and recruiting events. And by "script" I just mean how I usually say it—it's totally genuine. I chose Ropes & Gray because of the people I met, and every day/every year, that's the reason I stay as well, at the heart of it. Obviously, the matters are interesting, exciting and challenging, and some days and nights are long, and things are crazy, but at the end of the day, the people that I work on the matters with are always kind and they treat you like a person, which I think can't be taken for granted. Sometimes, I think it's important that while we're working hard and we have important and difficult matters to work on, at the end of the day, we're all people with lives outside of this firm, and for us to be recognized and treated with respect is really important and makes the job easier to do or possible to do, because it takes a lot, and it's definitely worth it, but it requires that kindness and respect from all of our colleagues. And I feel like I get that, and I'm glad I somehow saw that in the very brief interviews and conversations that I had with people during the on-campus recruiting and call-back process. Sometimes I feel very lucky that maybe I identified some kernel of that in those brief initial conversations with folks at Ropes.

Yoni Levy: Yes, I agree—people here are well rounded and interested in teaching you, but kind, generally kind. You mentioned being a person outside the office. What is something that you do outside the office in your spare time that you're willing to share? I'll start with you, Ani-Rae.

Ani-Rae Lovell: I really dug myself in on that one. Outside of the office, I'm really into home renovation and restoration. I love small DIY projects—anything from changing a light fixture or hanging curtains to bigger endeavors. I'm currently planning a kitchen renovation in my apartment in Brooklyn, and I'm really excited about it, albeit a little bit intimidated by the planning process. So, that's something I really enjoy doing. And I love shopping for vintage furniture and home goods. People on my teams like to tease me about how many antique doors I like to go out on the weekends and buy.

Yoni Levy: That's great. Do you do the actual work yourself, meaning the home repair-type work, or you like being a coordinator and having someone else actually do the implementation?

Ani-Rae Lovell: I try and do a fair amount of it myself. My dad is incredibly handy, and growing up, he built and fixed everything in every one of our homes, and so I try and emulate that a little bit. So, if it's something smaller, like repairing something on our deck or changing out, like I said, a light fixture, or painting the walls, I'll undertake that. I'll try and rope my husband in, but he doesn't enjoy it quite as much as I do. But the kitchen renovation is definitely going to be one for a contractor—I don't think I have either the expertise or the time to handle that one.

Yoni Levy: Yes, so very similar actually—my father also did all the home repair stuff growing up, and I'm pretty handy. So I did all the built-in lighting in my house—I had no built-in lighting when I bought it—and I do some light plumbing and the like. But we recently finished our basement, and my wife and I agreed that if we wanted it done sometime in the next five years, we should probably hire a contractor to do it, so we did. What about you, Christina—what are you fixing in your house?

Christina Ravelo: This is so impressive, that you guys are able to do this. So, two things: one is, I love cooking—absolutely love cooking small niche, and also love meal prepping and talking about meal prepping. So, you really don't want to get me started on it—I could talk about it for a really long time, and how to appropriately create a system for weekly meal prepping. But I do have to say that I do love cooking in general. My family is Cuban, my husband is Lebanese—I think we come from really interesting culinary backgrounds, and so something that's really important for both of us is really getting to learn the recipes of our cultures, and having that as part of our time at home. So, I'm constantly looking at recipes online to try different things every week, which is part of my meal prepping. And then, I have very serious wanderlust, and what that means is that I create fake itineraries for trips constantly. So, I have an entire file that's just dedicated to random, seven-day itineraries for trips, and so you'll find me a lot on travel blogs checking things out.

Yoni Levy: Can we just email you and ask for vacation itineraries before we go?

Christina Ravelo: Yes, I would love that. The COVID pandemic really led to a lot of pent-up itineraries over time when we weren't able to travel, but it worked out this year. We went on safari recently, so that was really fun, and we planned it ourselves—we did all the traveling ourselves.

Yoni Levy: Where did you go?

Christina Ravelo: We went to Tanzania and Zanzibar for two weeks, so at least I got to check off one of my itineraries from the file.

Yoni Levy: That's amazing. And do you have any Cuban-Lebanese fusion dishes? Like, what's a Cuban-Lebanese dish?

Christina Ravelo: There's a lot of meats involved, like, ground beef, for example, is a good one. But they're prepared in very different ways with different spices, so sometimes we might combine those to create…

Yoni Levy: Like a kibbeh?

Christina Ravelo: Yes, like a kibbeh with picadillo and Cuban food, so we might do that. Or, for example, both of them have pies, so it might be where we do the Cuban empanada, but with kibbeh meat in it.

Yoni Levy: Wow, that sounds amazing. When you open a restaurant, please make it kosher, and then I'll come.

Christina Ravelo: I was going to say, our long-term retirement life is that we want to have a Cuban-Lebanese restaurant, but we'll see.

Yoni Levy: Amazing. Thank you, Christina and Ani-Rae, generally, for joining and sharing your insights into government enforcement, health care, the women's circle, RMF (Ropes Multicultural Forum)—really all of your experiences at the firm. And thank you to our listeners—we hope you found this to be a useful episode. If there's a specific practice group or area you would like us to cover in a future episode, please reach out to me directly. I'd love to hear from you. If you're a U.S. law student or recent graduate and would like to learn more, please visit our website at ropesgrayrecruiting.com/US/law-students or check us out on Instagram at @ropesgray. You can also subscribe to this series wherever you typically listen to podcasts, including on Apple, Google, and Spotify. Thanks again for listening. See you soon.