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What's the biggest challenge you've faced in your career?

Developing a work-life design that engenders excellence in work and dynamic care for family is a challenge for everyone. As someone starting a career in the "in-between" generation, supporting both aging parents and growing children, my goals were further complicated by the extraordinary care needed for my daughter, who suffers from Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS). EDS is a life-altering rare disease that is terribly difficult to diagnose and even more difficult to treat. These are not challenges you can prepare for – they are circumstances that simply take your life in a different direction. I successfully balanced career and family care, but I didn't do it alone. What I have learned is it is okay to ask for help. It has truly taken a village of family, friends, caregivers and school administrators – all of whom have been a blessing in my life – to become the person I am today.

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What is something professional women need to know that isn't taught at school or in training?

There are two counterpoints here that are each equally important. First, identify as a lawyer before identifying as a woman lawyer. Be mindful to avoid creating barriers for yourself. My father, who was also a lawyer, taught me to expect a world free of barriers, thanks in large part to pioneering women such as my mother and aunts. By approaching life with an expectation of the best, I find that people live up to this expectation. On the flip side, women support women. Take the opportunity to learn from and be mentored by successful women – and take the opportunity to give back to other women. Women networks are inviting opportunities to expand your relationships, your social giving and your learning.

What's a mistake you've made and what did you learn from it?

A mistake I often make is being reluctant to ask busy people for favors. In trying to avoid creating an imposition, I miss the fact that people embrace the opportunity to be generous. I was overwhelmed by the generosity of professionals at Bracewell when I organized a Minute Mentoring experience for 30 high school students partaking in a winter program focused on careers in law and law enforcement. The students met a group of people who perform different functions in my law firm. The partners and professionals from my firm were wonderful in giving their time to these students, some of whom will be the first in their families to go to college. This also opened the students' eyes to careers that some didn't even know existed, such as the diversity and inclusion manager position at my firm. The feedback I got from students and from mentors was overwhelmingly positive, and I already have volunteer mentors for next year.

How has mentorship been an influence on your career?

When I was a junior associate, a top-named partner in my firm and I would lunch together regularly. We would brainstorm on whatever he was working on at the time. This expanded our creativity in solving problems and gave me a front-row seat at how a truly successful lawyer comes at a problem. That a top-tier lawyer would show me such respect, and show that he valued my opinion, empowered me to develop my skills and employ creativity in my work. It also constantly exposed me to an upper-level thinking, far more than might have come out of simply reviewing my projects. We were just "talking over lunch," but I got so much out of it. He treated me as an equal, which is something I remember to this day and try to carry over to those I mentor.

What's one thing most people don't know about you?

After graduating with a degree in chemical engineering from Northwestern University in 1986, I worked on a NASA project to build an oxygen station on the moon. The conceptual idea was to extract oxygen from sand. My lasting interest in space and the promise of commercial development beyond Earth spurred my interest in space-related patents and trademark issues.

What would be your fantasy career if you weren't doing what you're doing now?

To be the new Alex Trebek and host the game show Jeopardy! What's more incredibly fun than learning about history, the arts and pop culture as the host of a fast-paced trivia show. Not only is every day a game, but you get to travel to exotic locations to tape the show. It would be a win-win career!