

Intro:

This is Michael Cowen and welcome to Trial Lawyer Nation. You are the leader in the courtroom and you want the jury to be looking to you for the answers. When you figure out your theory, never deviate. You want the facts to be consistent, complete, incredible. The defense has no problem running out the clock. Delay is the friend of the defense. It's tough to grow a firm by trying to hold on and micro-manage. You've got to front load a simple structure for jurors to be able to hold onto. What types of creative things can we do as lawyers, even though we don't have a trial setting? Whatever you've got to do to make it real, you've got to do to make it real. But the person who needs convincing is you. Welcome to the award-winning podcast, Trial Lawyer Nation, your source to win maker verdicts, get more cases, and manage your law firm. And now, here's your host, noteworthy author, sought after speaker, and renowned trial lawyer, Michael Cowen.

Michael Cowen:

Today in Trial Lawyer Nation, I'm very happy to have our newly minted partner at our firm and a great lawyer, Laura Porter. How you doing today, Laura?

Laura Pazin Porter:

I'm good. Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Michael Cowen:

Thanks for coming on. It's your first time on the podcast.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Yes.

Michael Cowen:

No one told you when you made partner, you had to not just handle cases and manage people, but you also had to jump in on the podcast from time to time.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Yes, I'm excited. I'm excited to do it.

Michael Cowen:

Well, great. Well, I've loved practicing with you the last few years, and I'd like our audience to get to know you a little bit. Tell me a little bit about yourself.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Well, I'm from south Texas and Florida. My family moved from Florida to Texas when I was in high school. We moved to McAllen, Texas, which is located near the US-Mexico border in the Rio Grande Valley. I graduated from high school in McAllen and attended the University of Texas Pan-American in Edinburg, Texas, and graduated from there. After college, I moved to San Antonio, Texas to attend law school at St. Mary's University, and I've lived in San Antonio ever since.

Michael Cowen:

So you and I have one thing in common. We grew up on the Texas/Mexico, well, at least you went to high school and college on the Texas/Mexico border.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Yes.

Michael Cowen:

We have about 60 miles apart. Now, I'm older than you, so I was long gone by the time you got there. But I think that gives you a different perspective.

Laura Pazin Porter:

I agree. I agree. I love the Rio Grande Valley. My parents are there. Love to go back there and see friends. I did attempt to go back there to work after law school, but there were just more opportunities. The firm that I had been clerking at all through law school offered me a job, so I stayed in San Antonio.

Michael Cowen:

Basically, before you came to us, you had worked at one firm for how long?

Laura Pazin Porter:

Yes. So since after my first summer of law school, I started working at Lions and Rhodes, at the time. Later on, it became Tom Rhodes Law Firm. I worked there from, goodness, let's see, approximately 1999 until after Tom passed away. I'm just monitoring anything that's still out there for the firm.

Michael Cowen:

That's one of the things that I admired about you is that a lot of us jump around from job to job, and you find a place and stuck to it. They also stuck with you for the whole time.

Laura Pazin Porter:

They did.

Michael Cowen:

It was a very high-performing law firm. Very nationally known, big case, big verdict.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Yes. Yes.

Michael Cowen:

What are some things that you've learned through that first part of your journey working with Tom Rhodes and his firm that has served you well?

Laura Pazin Porter:

Attention to detail is important. But also Tom used to say, just keep swimming. Just roll. Don't let things set you off track. Just continue to push forward. We will have setbacks, but just keep pushing forward. So that's what I've tried to do, just keep a forward progressing momentum.

Michael Cowen:

I think that's so important because we all have ups and downs during a lawsuit. Very rarely do you have a case for you where you win every single hearing, every deposition goes perfectly, every moment in the trial is exactly the way you dreamt that it would be. Typically, the other side gets to play too and they don't just lay on their back and give up. They fight back.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Exactly.

Michael Cowen:

I think that learning how to not give up but keep going, knowing that we're hit them too, is so important. Now there, was it more like each lawyer had their own docket? Or was it more of a team approach?

Laura Pazin Porter:

It was more of a team approach. As a young lawyer, that's helpful to see how older, more experienced lawyers handle cases. I've worked primarily with Tom and we would approach things from a team aspect. We would have meetings and develop a litigation plan and litigate cases that way.

Michael Cowen:

What were some of the cool cases you worked on while you were there?

Laura Pazin Porter:

Well, definitely nursing home abuse cases, medical malpractice cases, cases with brain injuries in both children and adults. Just those that really stuck with me. I remember the cases. I take them on almost in a personal manner. I enjoy people, I enjoy meeting clients. So I like to have that relationship with them to help try and make them as whole as we can, from whatever situation they found themselves in.

Michael Cowen:

If I remember right, you got to work with a couple of our prior podcast guests. I think, didn't you work with both Hans Poppy and Randy [Megin 00:05:53] on different cases?

Laura Pazin Porter:

Yes. Yes, I did.

Michael Cowen:

Tell me about that.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Well, I worked more closely with Randy. Again, on a case in New Mexico. That was exciting to see how she approaches things. There aren't as many women trial lawyers, so I really was excited by the opportunity to work with her. Not only her, but also her partners, Alicia Montoya also, to see how they worked up cases. They just have a great, great office and a great environment. So I was excited to get to work with them.

Michael Cowen:

Them. Did you get to go to trial?

Laura Pazin Porter:

We did.

Michael Cowen:

What's it like trying a with Randy Megin?

Laura Pazin Porter:

She has her own style. I just really watched her. We would have meetings to decide who was going to do what. So each one of us knew what our role was.

Michael Cowen:

Any takeaways from watching Randy try? Case things that we could try to learn and adopt in our lives?

Laura Pazin Porter:

I really liked the way she spoke to the jury. She has a really good presence. It was interesting to me, when she would look at the jury and when she would look away, so it really captivated the jurors and anybody who was watching. I think that that is important, having a good presentation manner. It instills, I think, confidence and also comfort watching her and seeing the evidence being produced. It was just an overall positive experience. She brought her approach to trial, and Tom and our team brought our approach to trial, and the teams work together well.

Michael Cowen:

How were the approaches different?

Laura Pazin Porter:

That's a good question. Being that I had worked with Tom for so long, his approach was just second nature, to me. In my evaluation, he sort of set the standard as to what is done. Whereas, Randy came at it from a different perspective. Tom felt visuals were very important. Randy also felt visuals were very important. I think that was one of the most important parts was that a lot of times we do need to use visuals when presenting a case. It can make things more clear. Especially if there's some back and forth nature to it, you've got to have a visual to anchor what you're saying and to try and anchor the facts of the case.

Michael Cowen:

What are some of the visuals y'all used?

Laura Pazin Porter:

A calendar to try and show what was done when.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. Was it a nursing home case where they didn't do what they were supposed to do? What kind of case was it?

Laura Pazin Porter:

No, it was a hospital case. I don't know how much I can say.

Michael Cowen:

Okay. I don't want to cause problems.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Yeah.

Michael Cowen:

Okay. So how long had you worked at the Rhodes Firm before you came with us?

Laura Pazin Porter:

I believe it was over 16 years.

Michael Cowen:

So you had to then transition from working on a team to handling your own docket and leading a team. What were some of the challenges in making that transition?

Laura Pazin Porter:

Right. Well, as I had gotten older and more experienced at Tom's firm, I did have more, I guess you'd say, control over the docket and more management of the docket. So that wasn't foreign, but I didn't have my own legal assistant. I shared a legal assistant. So I didn't have the same structure that I have here at Cowen Rodriguez Peacock. So I have felt growth in both the types of cases that we've handled, as well as I have more support staff and other people helping. Having to be the leader that I would want is really what I try to do when I approach a meeting. As far as being mindful of people's time, trying not to have things drag on. Not that other people do, but that's just the standard that I've set for myself as I want to try and make it as efficient and meaningful of a period of time as possible when we do meet.

Michael Cowen:

Then you've also had to learn a new area of law. It's been personal injury, but you went from more professional medical negligence, I think you had some mass tort type stuff. Now, moving to mostly trucking and commercial vehicle wrecks. What did you do to master just a whole new area of law?

Laura Pazin Porter:

Well, I did get to have a little bit of exposure at Tom's firm with some of those, but definitely not to the degree that I've had here. Really, just this firm, Cowen, Rodriguez, Peacock, providing a lot of educational information to get myself ready. Also, I have an excellent legal assistant who's been and doing similar type of personal injury work for a really long time. So to some extent, it's just regular lawyering skills that you have, that you develop, and you just apply them to a new area in the law.

Michael Cowen:

I think there's nothing harder than medical negligence. Even without tort reform, people give doctors the benefit of the doubt, so you have to find a way to simplify complex issues. You have to find a way to work with science, with literature, with medicine. I think it's just like, Jill Fried and I both came from a heavy product liability background. We had to do similar things, and we've both done medical negligence before too. I think that made us better tracking lawyers. I think that's probably the same for you. Instead of trying to treat it like a big car wreck, you're still treating like a... I think Tom Rhodes once called it a nursing home on wheels.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Gotcha.

Michael Cowen:

They still have all the paperwork, they still have...

Laura Pazin Porter:

Yes, yes. I would agree that I think you're right, in that with our cases, you want to provide a simple, direct case to a jury. That helps you narrow the issues and pick your battles, so to speak.

Michael Cowen:

Absolutely. One note things I noticed in you in the last three years is just an increase in confidence in your own decision making. When you started, you much more wanted to get everyone else's input before making a decision. Now, I think you still seek collaboration when it is needed, but you're a lot stronger on just making a decision, or listening to a couple people and then going with it and not second guessing yourself. What do you think you've done to grow that part of yourself, that confidence, that decision making? It's impressive and I've loved seeing that growth. I was just to hear from your point of view. Is there anything we did that helped you get the confidence to make your own decision and just stick with it and move forward?

Laura Pazin Porter:

I think that the firm has been very supportive as far as providing the information, the skills and the tools that we need to make the best decisions for our clients. I find that helpful in allowing me to not second guess myself, and to go into a situation with confidence.

Michael Cowen:

Good. What are some things we've done specifically? I'm saying that partially for our guests, so they get something concrete, and partially for myself to know. I'd like to duplicate your success for other people. I would like to see, okay, I have my gut feeling about what I think worked with Laura, but I haven't really... This is kind of embarrassing. I haven't asked you not until we're now on the air doing it in person.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Yeah. I think one of the things that really is helpful is we did the JJ Keller training. I feel that put me on equal footing with a lot of our drivers in our cases. Having that body of knowledge, I think, is helpful.

Also just having worked on other cases of this type. The more of this type of case that I handle, the more confidence I have when they're concluded successfully. So I think it just builds.

Laura Pazin Porter:

I like our case valuation round tables that we have. I think it's important to hear different people's perspectives on a case and the value that they think a case either has or doesn't have. That then when we go into a mediation or a negotiation, we've already heard people's varying opinion on it. So it just allows us to come in with a more prepared mindset to counter other arguments, or just to know how to deal with issues before they're presented to the clients, too. So that we can already diffuse any issues that may come up during the mediation that might sidetrack us or our clients.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. Just for the listeners, that JJ Keller training, JJ Keller is a company that provides safety and training material literature to companies. They have a JJKellerTraining.com is one where we just had all of our lawyers go through the video training series that truck drivers should go through it in a reasonably prudent company. So that we'd be armed with a better feel for what the rules are. It's one thing to try to look stuff up. It's another to just get the kind of training that we're supposed to have. You mentioned our round tables. How often do we have those and handle those work? I know the answer, but I'm just wanting you to-

Laura Pazin Porter:

Yeah, yeah. We have a round table each week for an hour during the lunch hour. People present cases. We are usually provided information in advance about the cases, so we can do a little bit of research about the case and provide information about the medical bills and the injuries and the liability. Everything that you would have on the table to consider at a mediation. Then we present our case to the other members of the firm. We talk about what value we believe it has, and go from there.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. I found that they've been really helpful. One is that when we need, like when the mediator says, "Well, they didn't bring that kind of money. That's all they have." When you've got the group behind you, that we all decided that the case is worth at least this much. If they don't offer at least this much, we're going to walk away, it's so much easier to walk away.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Exactly.

Michael Cowen:

I think our values are increased. But the other thing I think what's helped is every now and then you get a lawyer that just falls in love with a case and they get blinders on. The case kind of sucks. It's not a good use of our time and effort and it needs to be settled for what that case is worth, not for what we wish it was worth. That's not that common. I'm getting better at saying no to bad cases and an intake, but it still happens. I think that has been eye-opening for people, too, to realize.

Michael Cowen:

I think it's also been liberating for people to realize we want to maximize the value of every case, which means we won't get the most that particular case is worth. Just because one person gets, let's say, \$10 million on their case, doesn't mean that your case that you're working on is worth \$10 million. It may, it may be a \$30,000, may be a great recovery on that case. Treating them as they need to be treated is the right thing for the client, because taking that case to trial is not necessarily in the client's best interest.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Right. You had asked about educational offerings that the firm has provided that have helped create more confidence in me. The big rig boot camps that you offer are also very, very useful and educational. I think that's really important. Also, our firm continuing education opportunities that we have weekly. I think those are really important, where you would present to us different issues that we can anticipate. I found those very helpful in responding to motions and just really equipping us with the tools that we need to be the lawyers that we want to be.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. I realized about three, four years ago that we were holding defendants to a standard, as far as training and accountability, that we weren't meeting ourselves. Decided we needed to try to change that. So we started doing our Friday trainings, the case valuation round table. Actually, that's an idea that Tim Mackey from Vista Consulting, another former podcast guest, gave me years ago and I just never implemented until a couple years ago. A lot of times you hear it and you're just not ready for it yet. You get this great advice, but you're not at your point in your life or your career where you can take that advice yet. Like my wife. I'm glad I met my wife when I met her. If I had met her five years earlier, she probably wouldn't have dated me, actually.

Laura Pazin Porter:

My husband says that about me. That had I known him in his younger years, I would not have dated him.

Michael Cowen:

That's what I'm saying. The same with laws. That we have to be at a point. There's progression, there's steps, and we have to sometimes just put something in the parking lot until we're ready to use it. You can't do everything at once. We've been through a lot of ups and downs at this firm to try to get where we are and we're still not perfect.

Announcer:

Each year, the Law Firm of Cowen, Rodriguez, Peacock pays millions of dollars in co-counsel fees to attorneys nationwide on trucking and commercial vehicle cases. If you have an injury case involving death or catastrophic injuries and would like to partner with our firm, please contact us. You can reach Delisi Friday by calling 210-941-1301, or send an email to Delisi@CowenLaw.com. That's D-E-L-I-S-I@CowenLaw.com. She will coordinate a time from Michael Cowen to speak with you in person or by phone to discuss the case in detail and see where we can add value in a partnership. Now, back to the show.

Michael Cowen:

I want you to be free to be perfectly honest on this. Is there anything we could have done better that maybe we didn't do as well as we could on developing you up, on increasing your confidence, that maybe made it harder for you?

Laura Pazin Porter:

I can't think of anything as I sit here. I know that having other lawyers within the firm who were willing to provide me guidance, share outlines, share resources. That really helped me initially get moving forward, as I was making that transition from my prior law firm to this law firm and this type of cases. Really, the lawyers within the firm helped. They really provided me that. At the time, I had to seek it out. It wasn't just offered. But once I asked for it, it was willingly given. So that would be the one thing, I guess, to maybe lawyers who are starting out or starting in a new firm. I would say, find other lawyers who are seasoned or who at least been doing the type of work that you're seeking to do for a longer period than you have. See if they have forms that they're willing to share with you, outlines they're willing to share with you, resources that they're willing to share with you, because those really can make all the difference.

Michael Cowen:

We have another lawyer starting next month. I guess we should, to welcome her, maybe go out of her way to let her know that, by the way, if you need these things we have them.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Yes.

Michael Cowen:

Your success is our success, obviously. I believe that even with people at other firms, we're perfectly willing to share. But definitely within the firm, to know what's there.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Right. It was given to me not as a limitation. It wasn't, here, you have to follow this form. No, it was here's this form, make it your own, build on it, but here's something to start with. So that I have that ability just to not start with a blank piece of paper. I had something to work from and create from.

Michael Cowen:

You've done a really good job lately of getting really good money on cases. What are some things you've found that have helped you convince an insurance company to pay top value on a case?

Laura Pazin Porter:

Just keep working it. I think that's really it. Just keep pushing it. Continue to follow the issues, look for new issues, look for pressure points. Just keep pushing the case. I think that's really it. Sometimes it's there on a case, sometimes it's not. I always look for areas, where else can I push? What else can I do here to keep pushing this case forward?

Michael Cowen:

I think that's fair. I think one of the biggest mistakes I used to make, and every now and then I'll slip, is someone will say, "Hey, let's put off all depositions, let's stop working on the case. Let's go mediating." We'd

agree to it, because you want to save money. You want to not have to do the work, and when you have to do the work it makes sense. But then you're sending them the signal that you're there to take what they're there to pay. I think the answer needs to be, if you want to stop doing all the work, pay me now. If you don't want to pay me now, we're going to keep getting ready for trial, because we want a lot of money on this case. If you're not ready to pay it, then we're going to try it. So let's keep working. If you want to stop spending money and stop doing the work, well then let's start. We don't need to wait for mediation. Start making the offers.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Right. Right. Or just say, yeah, we'll mediate, but let's go ahead and get these depositions on the books. Let's go ahead and get these things scheduled, so that you haven't put all your eggs in one basket.

Michael Cowen:

Exactly, and then they also see that your plan is not to go there and take whatever they offer, because that's what they expect.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Right.

Michael Cowen:

Laura, one of the things I've really admired about you is you have the ability to really keep things organized and get a lot of things done, because it's one of my big weaknesses. One of the reasons I think our firm succeeds is because I find people to compliment me. There's areas where I'm not talented or just don't have an actual inclination. I try to find people that have that. One thing I'm awful at is keeping everything organized, follow-up. You're really good at just keeping things going and not letting things fall through the cracks. How do you do that?

Laura Pazin Porter:

Well, I try to do that as best as I can. I do make notes for myself. I do each day write down the things that I need to get accomplished that day. I take joy in crossing them off the list. But I also have a dry erase board where I put relevant deadlines, expert deadlines, mediation deadlines, discovery deadlines. Things that I need to be sure to get accomplished. So I have my short-term goals and then my long-term goals. I think that keeps me oriented and moving forward with my day, but also with my week and the goals in the long run.

Michael Cowen:

It is interesting, even with all the computerized reminders we get, there's just something about having that visual where we can see it all the time, and not just pops up from time to time as a reminder really helps.

Laura Pazin Porter:

There really is, because I am an out of sight, out of mind person. So that's why I have to have things written down. I have to have the list. It commits it to memory more for me to keep me focused on what the goals are that I need to accomplish that day.

Michael Cowen:

Now, I've been told one of the more annoying things about working for me are some of my roles, which are the monthly file reviews, the documented writing, the monthly client call contact is documented in writing, the report that has to be written and submitted 90 days before an expert deadline and 90 days before trial. How much of a pain in the ass is it to do all that stuff that I'm asking you all to do?

Laura Pazin Porter:

Well, it is tough because it is time consuming, but they have a purpose. That's where I value the purpose of it, so I don't mind doing it because it has a purpose. The monthly file reviews are important to keep the cases moving forward, because we can get totally consumed in one case, and then, well what about all the others? Those monthly file reviews are very important in continuing to keep the cases moving forward.

Laura Pazin Porter:

So it's important also, I feel for me, to break up the cases so you don't have like your whole case docket. You're not reviewing it all at one time, but I make it more bite-sized, so to speak. I like to divide it into thirds so that it's more manageable at one time. I feel like we are in a better position to accomplish the goals that we set at that monthly file review, than if we did it in one lump review.

Laura Pazin Porter:

The client contacts are also important because people move, people's cell phone changes. The farther in time that you are from when that happens, the farther behind you are. So I think those client contacts are so very important, just because life moves fast and we need to stay with the clients. So all of those internal processes, I think, are important in moving the cases forward and not being surprised by deadlines. That's one of the things that I've liked being here, is that I did used to wake up in the middle of the night thinking when is that expert deadline? Or when is that whatever? Now I don't, because we have these systems and they generate reminders. I find that helpful and more lets me practice with less anxiety.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. In the last six months, between you and me working on Natalie's docket when she was on maternity leave, and now me covering from Mallory while she's on maternity leave, I've had to follow my own rules and do all these things. I admit, they're a pain in the butt, but then I remind myself why we have them. If I could find a way not to have... You don't know what a struggle it was for me to require a written report. We're not an insurance company. We don't require reporting. But I can't find a better way to do it. If you don't think about your experts 90 days before the deadline or more, but for sure 90 days before you're double checking everything, when are you going to do it? When it's too late?

Laura Pazin Porter:

Right.

Michael Cowen:

If you don't think about 90 days before trial, who can show up, do I need to make any exhibits, do I need to do a trial deficit to somebody, when are you going to do it? When it's too late? When you're going to be panicked? The panicked brain, or the stressed out brain, does not make good decisions. The panicked

brain or the stressed out brain is not the best at being kind, loving, and respectful of those around us. There's something about just having that little bit of discipline, even for those of us it doesn't come natural. Just realizing that, yes, it is a little bit of pain now, but it's going to save me from a lot of pain later.

Laura Pazin Porter:

That's right. Yeah. I know some firms may have litigation team meetings to prepare for trial, but this is another way to do it. So it's whether you do it in a report or whether you do it in a litigation team meeting, it really has to happen.

Michael Cowen:

Now, you've taken another step in your development. Not only have you made partner, but now you have an associate.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Yes.

Michael Cowen:

Now, you've got a great one.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Yes.

Michael Cowen:

What are some of the things you've learned that you find interesting about now you're having to develop someone else?

Laura Pazin Porter:

I do try to think of what would I have wanted? What would I like for somebody to do? What would I want for someone to share with me? So that's how I've tried to approach it. He has some experience, so he's very sharp and very smart. I just keep trying to keep it interesting for him, because sometimes you can get bogged down in the every day. I just try to keep it interesting for him and look for new opportunities that he might enjoy.

Michael Cowen:

What are some of the things you've done to try to make his life better or help develop him?

Laura Pazin Porter:

Well, I do share him with another lawyer, so I do ask him, how's your load? Do you need more stuff? Do you need less stuff? I will ask him what he's doing. He has gotten to help me both trying to strike experts as well as responding to motions to exclude experts. Let's see. Also just jury charges so that he can start getting familiar with those, because it really is the foundation of what we're trying to prove at the end of the day.

Michael Cowen:

Absolutely.

Laura Pazin Porter:

So I figure, let's let him already be thinking about those issues. How we're going to present this to the jury, the questions that we would want, the instructions we would want. Those sorts of things.

Michael Cowen:

In your prior career, did you work with any trial consultants or litigation strategists?

Laura Pazin Porter:

Jury consultants, we would once in a while. It was usually if co-counsel had a relationship with them already. As far as litigation consultants, no, we did not. So that's been interesting to me. We usually stuck with our trial lawyer CLE opportunities, which are good. But I just feel like there's been more varied opportunities here that I've gotten to participate in.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. I encourage everyone the extent the budget allows. Of course, they charge way too much. All of them charge way too much money, and they're never worth it, I think, hardly ever. Unless you have some mega case, they're hardly ever worth it for the case. But they're worth it for the career, if that makes sense. The skills you learn. Like we worked with Rodney Jew a couple times. Now, there's some cases where... Every case, I will say, that we worked with him, we got our money back. We did very well in those cases. We picked the right cases, but I think he did help us add value. I think the bigger value is the skills we learn, both some of the critical thinking and strategy skills, and then the how to present our cases better visually that we learned from him. Now we use that in case after case, after case, without having to go back and pay him even more ungodly sums of money.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Right. Well, and I think Tom may have attended some courses, or maybe he determined it on his own. I learned some of that from him, so I can see similarities. But I know I didn't attend any of those. Part of it, too, may have been, I started a family while I was working for Tom's firm. When you have little kids, it's harder to get out of town to go to things. But I continued to practice and...

Michael Cowen:

I have friends question me like, why are you spending all this time and money educating? Aren't you afraid they're just going to leave? What I said yesterday, and I really meant it, I said, "I really want a firm that everybody in town is trying to steal our people every day." I want every lawyer here to be recruited constantly, that every other firm wants them. I also want them to not want to leave. To build a place that... No one's here because, well, you can't get any better. Or you can't go on your own and succeed. That you're here because we're providing a better place for you than you can get somewhere else.

Michael Cowen:

I'm now I'm not saying that we're... We're not for everybody. I'm not saying that I'm always going to succeed. It's a lot of people. Some people have the grass is greener syndrome. Some people just aren't going to like me, are going to get of what we're doing. That's fine. I least want the goal to be everyone is

really good so that everyone would want us to take them, but then they're so happy that they don't want to go. I'd rather have the risk of someone really good leaving than have a bunch of people that aren't that good working with me.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Right. Right. Well, I think it matters, the environment that is set up. Setting up the expectation and the desire for excellence. I think that is important. I think that it's encouraging and it makes for an uplifting environment.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. I want to get some mix between just letting things slide, and then the firm where I was at New York when I was a baby lawyer where I got two assignments. One was from a partner and one was from a senior associate, and I worked until four in the morning and finished the partner's assignment. Then I came back in the office about 9:30 and I got reamed by the senior associate. She's like, "When did you go home last night?" I said, 4:30 in the morning. "When did you get back here?" "About 9:30." "So you had time to sleep, you had time to eat, you had time to shower, you had time to finish my project. You need to set your priorities if you want to make it with this firm."

Laura Pazin Porter:

Yeah, well and that's not enduring. That's not someplace where somebody wants to stay. That's where I think it's important to be in a workplace that is supportive, but we'll also challenge you and push you to get better.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. It's finding that line of trying to hold that standard of excellence, but then not being a miserable...

Laura Pazin Porter:

Yeah, inhumane.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. Kind of because it's a lot of it, because there are times. I mean, we try to things out in the past. We try not to have last minute things. Frankly, there are times when we are working fast. There are times when we do have to work, like this Saturday. I take a lot of weekends off, but this Saturday I'm going down to Laredo, Texas to meet with witnesses and get them ready for a trial we have coming up in a little over a month. Again, it's because I don't want to be meeting with them the weekend before trial. I want to be meeting with them with enough time to develop their stories, to develop my own opening, and make sure that it's true. That what I think the story is, is the story.

Michael Cowen:

So sometimes we do have to do that. I think making it pleasant, what we do, is an important part of it. I don't mind working late. I worked past midnight once last week, unfortunately. I went home, took a little break, and I'm probably going to do the same tonight, but it's not an everyday thing. I think just trying to find that balance between, yeah, we are going to work in the night if we have to, but we're also not going to do it just to do it. We're also not going to be mean to each other. You can be a sweat shop and make people work late every night. I have some friends, they make the lawyer come in every

Saturday. It's their firm, and if that's how they want to have it, if people want to work that, I respect it. It's just not what I want to do.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Yeah. I think it's important, too, each person has to figure out what they're willing to do. I appreciate the flexibility to be able to do some work from home. There are times where I'll work during the day, and then once my kids have gone to sleep, then I can work a little bit longer on something. Especially if I have a deposition the next day. I'm focused on that particular issue. But other times, I've done a deposition during the day and have some things I want to get done still that day. So then later that night, I'll work on those. You can't burn yourself out, but you also have that desire to keep pushing things forward.

Laura Pazin Porter:

To some extent, I feel like people are more willing to work longer hours if extra hours aren't automatically required. I know some folks, I can see the value to some extent of working on a Saturday, but I know how important Saturdays are for my family and with my kids. So I will say that I believe I work harder for you during the week so that I can have my Saturdays. I think that's where there's a balance there.

Michael Cowen:

I agree. Like I said, I'll work a Saturday when I have to. I no longer view it as a badge of honor. Oh, I worked past midnight. Frankly, I'm going to work past midnight tonight. What I'm thinking is, you dumbass, you should have prepped a little earlier for this depo you have tomorrow, and then you wouldn't be having to work late tonight.

Michael Cowen:

Now, the other difference is I am still going to go home at a decent hour. I'm going to exercise, I'm going to have been with my family, I'm going to put my son to bed, and I'm going to back work. Instead of staying here until 10 or 11 and then feeling like a bad father and not taking care of myself. I'm going to find that balance. Most of the time, it is a little self-imposed, but sometimes I'm going to have to work real late tonight because I wanted to take last weekend.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Right. Yeah, and trial is a special time period. There's not a trial every week, generally, for a case that's really going to go and then last a week in duration. It does build up, so I do push other things to the side when I'm preparing for trial. Of course, after the trial, then usually there's some makeup time where I have some downtime. At least try to get some downtime to come back from that. So it sort of all balances out.

Michael Cowen:

How do you know? I know one thing I struggle with is balancing being a parent, being a spouse, and being a lawyer. I'm trying to do all three at a high level. I'm trying to be a really good lawyer, but I don't want to be a bad dad or a bad husband to be a good lawyer. What are some things you've found that have helped? Or maybe you haven't. I have no idea.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Yeah, no. I think it's an ongoing process that we, as lawyers and people and parents have. I think it changes with your kids and your kids' needs, based on where they are. Also with your spouse and your spouse's needs. One of the things that I liked about my spouse, or in that my spouse and I have in common, is that we both are hard workers and we enjoy doing a good job. We enjoy being proud of the work that we do. So we have that commonality. He's not a lawyer, but we have that same value. In that way, it's easier for us to know where the other one is coming from when we do have to work late hours, so the other one picks up the slack with the kids and whatnot. But also, it makes me want to be more hands-on, because when I'm not in trial or not working on a deadline, then I need to have some time with the kids, too, so that my spouse can do what he needs to do.

Laura Pazin Porter:

So I think it's just continuing to monitor, so to speak, and assess what your kids need and what your spouse needs, and what you need. Because if you run yourself ragged and not taking care of yourself, that will catch up with you also. So I think it's a balancing of all those.

Michael Cowen:

Absolutely. Yeah. Like I said, I don't have the solution there. It's a constant struggle in my life of trying to balance out all the different things I do and be a good spouse and be a good parent. I try to remember Randy Megin saying that, "You can have it all, you just can't have it all at the same time."

Laura Pazin Porter:

Right. Yeah.

Michael Cowen:

I try to block out really intense time, do really neat and fun things with kids, and also try to make the time just to be there for the little things, because it's not just about the big moments. Then in exchange, that they're going to know that there's sometimes when I'm working late and that's just what it's, and just not do it every night.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Right. Yeah. It's just do as much as we can. I feel like it's important to me, for my girls, to see me working and knowing that I'm working. I feel like girls need to know how to provide for themselves. Men are great and women are great, but we do need to be able to know how to provide for ourselves and have skills to provide for ourselves. So I think it's important for girls to have that example.

Michael Cowen:

Well, you're definitely doing a good job on your part.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Thank you.

Michael Cowen:

Well, Laura, thanks for talking. I know it's always a little different to come in and talk in front of an audience. You can't see them, but a few thousand people listening in on our conversation. But I do appreciate it. I love practicing with you. I'm so glad that you're here. You came in as a good lawyer, but I've really enjoyed seeing your growth and I really am looking forward in anticipation to see where you're going from here.

Laura Pazin Porter:

Well, thank you. It's been a great environment to work in. I thank you and I thank Sonya and Mallory, the other partners, for the environment that y'all have all created. I'm grateful to be here. I thank God for this opportunity and the drive that he's placed in my heart to continue to represent plaintiffs.

Michael Cowen:

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