



Ep. 2: Women in Law: How We Got Here, Why We Stay, and Tips for the Next Gen

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Music & Legally Qualified Intro Voiceover: Welcome to RumbergerKirk's Legally Qualified Podcast, where we answer important questions facing businesses today and discuss hot topics in the legal industry. From employment law to commercial litigation, product liability and everything in between, we've got it covered.

Rebecca Arends: Hello everyone. I'm Rebecca Arends, an attorney with RumbergerKirk practicing in casualty and trucking litigation in the firm's Tampa office. I've been practicing law for six years after graduating from Florida State University. In addition to my practice, I am extremely service oriented and volunteer for a number of organizations, including the Tampa Bay Chamber, Emerging Leaders of Tampa Bay, the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, the American Cancer Society, Every (sounds like: Defining) Refuge, just to name a few.

Carie Hall: And I'm Carie Hall. I'm a partner practicing primarily in casualty litigation, also out of the firm's Tampa office. I've been practicing law for over eight years and have worked here at the firm in almost every capacity since I was in high school.

Rebecca Arends: On today's podcast we're taking a closer look at women in law in honor of Women's History Month, which has been celebrated in the US each March since 1987 honoring women's contributions to history, culture and society. We're going to share our stories, how we came into the profession, what it takes to be a successful female attorney, lessons learned along the way, challenges and obstacles we faced and advice to those following in our footsteps.

Carie Hall: You know, it's really incredible how far women have come in this profession when you consider that we just celebrated the 100th year of women's suffrage last year. In fact 65 years ago in 1956 when the late Justice Ruth Bader Gindberg first entered law school, she was just one of a few of other women in her class. But toward the end of her career in 2018, the American Bar Association reported that women outnumber men in law school classrooms for the third year in a row.

Rebecca Arends: And that's where we'll begin. Carie, what made you interested in becoming an attorney?

Carie Hall: You know, I was drawn into the legal profession at an early age. I always wanted to be a lawyer, right after I stopped wanting to be an astronaut. I think that was my first real career that I really contemplated going into from a young age. In high school I enjoyed watching trials, and I participated in the (inaudible) program, which was run by a local judge. We would meet with the judge once a month, and she would mentor us, teach us about the legal system and introduce us to attorneys and other judges in the area.

I began working at RumbergerKirk right after high school in a variety of roles over the years. From receptionist, runner, file clerk, secretary to paralegal and eventually went to law school while working full-time as a legal secretary at the firm. While I was growing up my next-door neighbor was a prosecutor and I used to listen to him talk about trying cases. So by the time I graduated high school he had joined the firm, and that's who I ended up working here at such a young age.

Rebecca Arends: I think it's really interesting that you've had so many positions in the firm. There's certainly something that's unique and I think something that's very important as well. I personally have spoken to other law students and would encourage anyone who's trying to go to law school to take the opportunity to look for runner positions or some type of internship where they can get an understanding of the workings of a firm. Kind of similar like you did. It's really a great thing to do.

It's funny that you mention high school. Same thing with me. When I was in high school I participated on a mock trial team, and I actually loved it. I told my parents that I wanted to be an attorney and they looked at me like I was absolutely crazy. We didn't have any attorneys in my family, and we didn't really know any attorneys. But here I am 15 plus years later, and I'm an attorney now. And I know that they're very proud of my accomplishments. So Carie, tell us more about your early experience becoming an attorney. Did it ever cross your mind that it wasn't really a traditional career path for a woman?

Carie Hall:

You know, it never really did. That's something that never really crossed my mind. Maybe it should have. I don't know if it's something that I should have been more cognizant of. But I wasn't. I wanted to do it, and it never stood out to me that maybe this isn't an option for me. Maybe that's a sign of the times that I made the decision to do this in. Or maybe it's just a sign of the group that I was surrounding myself with, that it never occurred to me that that was a hurdle.

When I started at the firm back in the early '90s, this firm was trying cases all over the country. And someone was almost always in trial. Because I had the ability to travel, I was fortunate enough to attend trials all over the place and observed many of our lawyers in trial. Most of whom were men, and it was just who I was watching. But I did have the opportunity to witness some trials that were tried by some female partners in our firm back then. And honestly, it never stood out to me that there was even a difference between the genders in the courtroom. It was never an issue, and I just never really thought about it.

From the time that I decided that I wanted to actually do this as a career, I knew what I wanted to do. But I had some challenges to overcome as to my path because of some other choices I had made to marry and start a family really young. So when I made the decision to go back to law school, I was a divorced mother as a young child. And my path was not exactly traditional, but it had its own rewards. But even given

my path going into a male dominated world, that never intimidated me. And frankly I don't even see it that way anymore. How about you Rebecca?

Rebecca Arends: Well first Carie, I think it's incredible that throughout this process you had a family and you were working full-time. That's something that I plan to hopefully do in the near future as well. So for me personally it's great to see such a successful female attorney having already gone through that process and kind of watched your path and see that it's certainly something that's possible. But for me, it's funny, because when I was in law school there were really more women in the class than there were men. Which kind of is a testament to how far we've come. There's definitely still some old school attitudes out there, but I do think that things are changing. And while we may outnumber men in law school, we certainly don't in practice currently.

I do believe that will change. I do believe that we will see more women entering the practice. But also it's very challenging for women to find that balance between life and family and their career. So what have you found has really led to your successful?

Carie Hall: Well, there's no doubt that being an attorney is a high performance and challenging profession, and it requires a lot of hard work and juggling of responsibilities, both at work and in my personal life to be successful. But there's no doubt in my mind that it can be done because we've been doing it. But I will say I have not done it alone. I've had a lot of help along the way. I couldn't have gone back to school without my parent's help, in addition to helping with childcare and transportation for my kid to all of the after school activities. They've always been my biggest cheerleaders, and you mentioned the same about your family Rebecca. But it does matter that you have support and that people do help you along the way.

It took me quite a few years to complete my undergraduate degree at night while working full-time before I even got to the point of applying for law school. And by that time my kid was in middle school. So not only did my kid have to deal with my

stress level while I was juggling so much between working full-time and law school classes at night and on the weekends my constant studying. But I also recruited my family to help out where they could. I practiced oral arguments in front of them. I practiced opening and closing statements. I begged them to proof read papers. I even brought them in to serve as witnesses and jurors for my mock trial in my Trial Ed class in law school. So having everybody that came in to support me was essential. But I do think that this is something that can be done no matter what your position. It just might take a little bit of creativity to get it done.

Rebecca Arends: I think that's awesome that you were able to do all that. You really emphasized the importance of having a great support system. We're both very, very lucky that we've had those support systems. I personally am really lucky, even though I don't have kids right now, I have an adorable fur baby, my cocker spaniel Brody who's still a puppy. And my long-term boyfriend Anthony, they're both very supportive of everything that I have been doing and working on. There's plenty of nights when I'm standing in the kitchen cooking dinner and Anthony's kind of watching me as I'm practicing what I'm preparing to say to the judge during an upcoming hearing. And he's very supportive in kind of helping me with that practice as well.

And I think whether it's family or friends, it's important to have both really to help support you. And one of the really important things for me personally, as I said, I do a lot of volunteering here in the community, is time management. I think time management is really key to being successful as well. One of the things that I do with all of my volunteering is I set a schedule at the beginning of the week. If there's a particular project that I need to work on for one of those volunteer positions, I make sure that I have a good, solid hour on my calendar at some point during the week. My motto is, is that you can always find time somewhere, but it's definitely to work on time management and to be able to work on multitasking as well. What are your thoughts?

Carie Hall: I couldn't agree more. What you're talking about there with multitasking and time management couldn't be more critical in being successful with what we do. Time

management is critical to succeeding in this profession, and multitasking unfortunately is part of it. We're constantly – have to juggle deadlines along with whatever we have going on with the events that we have scheduled for the week in addition to our actual home lives. Everything is deadline drive in what we have going on.

So when you're juggling a large caseload, you have to constantly be aware of your upcoming events and deadlines and build a plan in time to prepare for everything. But if what is important to you is things that are not only in your profession, whether it is volunteer work or your family life, you have to build that into your schedule. It's not something that can be done without paying attention to what you have to deal with during the week. You have to become extremely efficient so that you can devote the time that's away from work to quality time with whomever you spend your time with. And sometimes you even have to recruit them to help you practice. But the goal here is making sure that you have enough time to get everything done during the week and still enjoy your life.

Rebecca Arends: I completely agree with you. I think setting aside time to spend with loves ones and family members is so incredibly important. Again, that's also your support system. So it's important to be able to give time back to them as well. And like I said with the volunteering that I do as well in the community, as I said, I build that into my schedule. And one of the main reasons is because I want to inspire other female attorneys out there as well to continue giving back to the community, even if their schedules are difficult. There's certainly always time out there, and I think it's also important to really kind of figure out what is important to you, what you're passionate about in terms of community involvement. And also include that in your busy work schedule as well.

Carie Hall: Rebecca, I think it's really great that you have made volunteering such an important part of your life, and you spend a lot of time doing it. What inspired you to make this such a priority?

Rebecca Arends: Well, back during my first year of law school I was actually diagnosed with leukemia. And I was very lucky, it ended up being a pre-cancerous diagnosis and I only had to undergo minimal treatment for about nine months before I was released. And one of the things that I realized going through that experience is the importance of giving back to those who are also going through similar experiences.

So when I got back to Tampa after being in law school I made the decision to make volunteering really a priority and to make sure that I was giving back to my community as much as I possibly could. So through that I've spent a lot of time developing my passions, developing what I want to volunteer about. I spent a lot of time with the American Cancer Society and Leukemia and Lymphoma Society to give back to those who currently have cancer or who have a loved one who has or had cancer and to try and take my experience and turn it into as much of a positive light as I possibly can.

And also one of the really great things is, you know, despite having such a busy schedule, I've been able to make it a priority throughout my career and thankfully Rumberger also has been incredibly supportive in all of those efforts.

Carie Hall: Well, Rebecca, your experience is definitely unique and it's wonderful that you've been able to take that, something that could have been a hardship and turn it into a positive and to model some positive things in your life out of it. And we can all learn from that. I think that there's definitely room for all of us to build that into our schedules. It just takes, as I mentioned earlier, a little creativity in finding something that you're passionate about. Because if you're passionate about it, you will devote the time. And it's a lot easier to find time when it's something that really speaks to you.

Rebecca Arends: I completely agree, and speaking of learning from those tougher situations, let's talk about some of the unique challenges female attorneys face. It clearly takes a strong work ethic and temperament to succeed as a trial lawyer. But unique challenges have you faced as a woman in this field Carie?

Carie Hall:

There's a few things that come to mind. I mean, it starts with just names we are called. You can be in a room full of a group of people, and all of a sudden an older – and it's usually an older man will refer to you as "honey" or "sweetie." And you might be surprised how often you hear these types of pet names. And they would never do that to another male sitting at the table. And whether it's intentionally done or whether they are actually just trying to be nice, it is not something that they would ever do to a male.

So they may not be always malicious, but the fact that they look at us as someone who is not equal to them by using pet names, you have to learn to read the situation. And sometimes I just let it go and ignore it, depending on the context of what's going on at the time. But sometimes you may have to stop them and just correct them and remind them that they really shouldn't be referring to you by pet names.

I have stopped them and said, "My name is Carie," then I've kept going. And then there's another issue that I have come with and this is more – not necessarily because of male attorneys. But it's because of me as a woman. As a trial lawyer I have to be aware of my delivery in a courtroom. I could use the exact same words as a male attorney, but my delivery could be received differently by the audience. And so I have to be cognizant of that. So you try to find a balance between being assertive and aggressive. And honestly, this is not something that most men even have to worry about.

So it's something that I have been cognizant of in trying to be aware of my delivery, I've been told that I'm not loud enough sometimes in the courtroom. Which is funny to me because I've never been told that I'm not loud. And so the fact that I come across that way in the courtroom is not what I am going after. I think it is because I'm trying to dial it back a little bit and make sure that I'm not appearing aggressive. But my goal has never been to appear timid to the jury or for a jury not to hear my arguments. So it's something that I have had to correct and be cognizant of. And it's something that you have to learn throughout life, but especially in front of a jury. You

want to avoid coming across as overly aggressive. So it's something that I've worked with. Have you had any of those issues yourself Rebecca?

Rebecca Arends: Well, first of all Carrie, I appreciate you sharing all of that, especially as someone who is looking to follow in your footsteps as a trial attorney as well. The things that you're talking about, even just courtroom demeanor, it's very interesting. But I've certainly had similar situations in depositions, hearings and conversations on the phone with opposing counsel. And as you said, it's typically an older male for the most part when these scenarios happen. A lot of the times they don't take me as seriously as they probably should because of my age and I believe because of my gender as well.

And sometimes they ask questions that I doubt they would really ask a male attorney. So, for example, during a deposition recently an opposing counsel and I were having some small talk before the deposition. And he was asking me some questions, if I was married and asked when I planned on starting to have a family. And I don't believe that there was any ill intention by making those comments. But at the same time, I walked out of that room following the deposition thinking to myself, would he have asked those questions if I was a male sitting there in the room with him? And I think the answer is no.

And it's interesting kind of how we still see this pattern of some of the male attorneys treating us with not the same equality as they would if we were a male attorney and also some of the questions that they ask as well.

Carie Hall: Yeah, I have to agree. It's just one of the things that we all need to be careful about when you're making small talk. Sometimes things that - you might be just trying to speak off the cuff and you have to be cognizant of how that is received and whether there is inherent gender bias in some of the comments you're even making. And I think that is something that we should all be aware of.

Rebecca Arends: Exactly. So learning from these obstacles, what advice would you give to the next generation of young female attorneys specifically?

Carie Hall: Well, coming off of the conversation we just had, my first piece of advice would be develop thick skin. You don't want to let them see you sweat. You don't want to let them know they're getting under your skin. And if they do get under your skin, it's sometimes better to just let it go and move on. Although sometimes you do need to address it. But I think developing a thick skin will help you in many ways. One, because you have to project confidence. One of my mottos as a young lawyer has been, fake it until I make it. That is something that I think in practice it is – it's very intimidating when you first start out in practice. None of us really know what we're doing. We're just learning. That's why it is called a practice. We're all learning every day.

And if you don't project confidence, if you have an older attorney on the other side, they will sniff it out and they will sometimes use it against you. And you can't let the other side smell fear in this. It doesn't really matter who it is on the other side. It's one of those things that you learn, that you have to project confidence because if the other side smells fear, they'll take advantage of it. There's a lot of unknowns and nerves and fears that you have to get over. So if you're offended by something, sometimes it's best to just let it go and as I said, fake it until you make it.

Rebecca Arends: One hundred percent, I think that's especially important as a younger attorney. I've noticed that a lot of male attorneys will try to take advantage of the situation if you're nervous or if you are not projecting confidence. They pick up on it. They have the perception that a younger female attorney isn't capable of doing the same job. And that can be pretty difficult and like you said, it's important to have that tough skin.

Carie Hall: It is and there's been a couple of times when I've been standing in the hallway before a UMC hearing and there's a whole group of people out there. And opposing counsel clearly thinks that I'm the court reporter. And they have assumed such, and we get

into the hearing room and it's fun to see the look on their face when they realize I'm opposing counsel when I announce myself for the record. So sometimes it's best to let it go and just see how they are going to react when you hit them with it. But you don't have to do it in such an aggressive way. You can just kind of smile, and usually they're super embarrassed and will say something later.

Rebecca Arends: I would absolutely love to see that. That is incredible. Another piece of advice I offer to new attorneys is that you also have to be willing to put in the work to get to a position where you obtain successes. And a big way of doing that is taking things one step further. So a lot of the times doing the extra research, doing the extra work that's not necessarily asked of you in order to produce the best quality work possible. And so I think taking that extra step is such a really important thing to do. Sometimes it can be draining. Sometimes you don't always have the time to do that. But when you can, I think it is important to remember to do more than what's just required or expected of you.

Carie Hall: I agree Rebecca. I think it's important to over prepare sometimes so that you know exactly how to anticipate what other questions might be asked when you've been given an assignment. And over preparing can be a great way to increase your confidence level as well. Let's talk about the importance of mentoring and what effect that can have on helping young women or any attorney develop their careers. In fact a really great mentor can make all the difference in the world. Have you had any good mentors Rebecca?

Rebecca Arends: I am very lucky, I have had a lot of mentors in my career so far. And I actually have a mentor through Rumberger who has been incredibly helpful in terms of helping me succeed. If I ever have any questions, he's always available to reach out to and to ask those questions. And just as important as finding a good mentor, I think it's also important to be a good mentee. And what I mean by that is, as a mentee it's important for me to put in the time and the effort to really build that relationship and prepare and ask questions when I am meeting with my mentor, so that we can

further build our relationship. And also it helps us both in terms of success by being as prepared as possible.

Carie Hall: You bring up a really good point Rebecca. A mentor is only as good as what you are willing to take and learn from them. And sometimes people ask what they should be looking for in a mentor. And what I look for in a mentor and some of the things that I would suggest looking for in a mentor, include someone who is successful and driven and maybe someone with a similar background to yours. Or maybe even someone with a vastly different background because you can learn so much from someone who is very different from you.

But I think you want to look for someone that has a good reputation in the community, that practices with integrity. And what's most important for me is finding someone who is passionate about the practice. I want to be around people who love this work because I think that passion is contagious. And in order to be happy in what you do, I think you do have to have passion for it. So Rebecca, tell me about some experiences you've had with your mentors.

Rebecca Arends: Sure, so as I said, I have a mentor here in the firm, Mike Forte. He has offered me so much advice in terms of time management, how to improve my work, focusing on – providing me as much feedback as possible so that way I can continue with improving my skill and improving the quality of my work. And as I stated, if there's anything that I ever need, he's always there to kind of help guide me, which is really fantastic.

And Carie, you and I are lucky because we work in the same offices, and I know that you've had some great mentors as well. So can you tell me a little bit about your experience with some of the mentors that you've had?

Carie Hall: Certainly. As a lawyer I've had many mentors within the firm. And interestingly, they haven't actually been women. One of my mentors has been our administrative partner in the Tampa office, Rob Blank. When I started working at this firm he was a

first year lawyer. So I really watched him grow as a lawyer throughout the years. And during my first few weeks at the time he practiced his first opening statement for trial. And at that time I was 17 years old. And I've watched him and another one of my mentors, Dick Caldwell try cases together and watching how they worked together for the client and loved the work that they were doing. And of course they were winning, which also makes it a lot more fun.

So all of that was part of what drove me to want to do this work for myself. Both of them in trial are the most calm and seem to be happiest and most focused, and they make trial fun. And it has been something that has been contagious for me. And 17-year-old me, never got over that trial bug, and so I had to go to law school to do it.

So one of the things that I will mention though is that your mentor doesn't always have to be someone inside the firm. You can look outside, although our firm certainly has plenty of mentors. There are also experiences outside the firm with mentors. And Rebecca, would you like to talk about some of your experiences with that?

Rebecca Arends: Yes, so currently I am mentoring a young student at USF and she is a first generation college student. She's overcome a lot of obstacles, even just to get to college, which is really amazing. And now she's just recently applied to several law schools here in the state, including Stetson Law in the Tampa area. And I'm incredibly proud of all of her accomplishments so far. As a mentor I've been trying to help guide her as much as possible, answer questions that she has about the application process. And also in terms of studying for the LSAT and what to expect from law school. So it's been really rewarding for me to be able to give back to such an amazing individual.

And then also outside the firm, throughout my career I've taken advantage of internships that I have had with judges and kind of keeping up those relationships. So that way I can kind of continue that mentorship relationship as well. And I've also just in general been very lucky to have other mentors from other firms, female and

male, from all different kinds of experiences who have continued to, again, support me and create part of that support system that's so important.

So I have found it very rewarding as well to not only have my mentor here in the firm, but also to have mentors and mentees outside of the firm as well. Speaking of rewarding, we talked a lot about the hard work and obstacles involved in being a lawyer. Some people might be wondering why in the heck would anyone would choose this profession? Perhaps we should talk a little bit about what we enjoy so much about practicing law. Carie, I'm interested in hearing what you love most about your work as well as what goals you have set for yourself in the future.

Carie Hall:

Sure, so one of the things that I love the most about what I do is trial work. Trial is for me the whole point of what we do. It's when you get to see your case and all the hard work that you have done come to fruition. And you put it all together, and you present it to a jury. And it's what the whole point is of litigation. Obviously not every case goes to trial. In fact it's very rare that they do these days. But to me the hard work, all putting it together and culminating in the trial is one of the most rewarding parts of my job.

But every single day I find myself learning something new. And that's one of the things that I really enjoy. If you are paying attention to what's really going on in your cases, you might have multiple different cases that have similar types of issues in them. But every case has some different nuance to it. Whether it's a different legal issue or a different factual issue that you have research. And you have the opportunity to learn something new from every single case.

Working with experts is really rewarding as well. I get to learn from them as they educate me on their subject matter. And in order to better represent my client, I have to learn it too, and you can never get bored in this profession if you're really paying attention to everything that's going on in you cases. Because there really is a lot of nuance to every single case.

So one of the goals that I have set for myself is to become board certified in civil trial. There are very few women who are board certified in civil trial, and it is something that I have set as a goal for myself. And in addition to achieving the required number of civil trials, you have to actually have a certain number of trials under your belt. But then you also have to study for and pass another exam, which is not something that I thought I'd ever find myself doing after I finished law school and passed the Bar Exam. But here I am, I've set a new goal to take another exam, which is kind of surprising. But that's where we are.

Rebecca Arends: Carie, I think your path has been just absolutely an amazing accomplishment and such an inspiring story. The fact that you've gone from being a runner in the firm and you've had so many other positions, and now your goal is to become a certified trial attorney, civil trial attorney, is truly amazing. And like you said, there's not a lot of females out there who are board certified civil trial attorneys. So I think it's incredible what you're working on and how much you've already accomplished.

And for me, some of the things that I really enjoy about the profession, I enjoy attending hearings, speaking in front of a judge, speaking with my clients about certain issues and working on complex issues within a case. And kind of having to try and find those creative solutions. Some of my future goals including hopefully, if trials start up again soon, second chairing a trial in the near future and continuing to grow and develop my relationships with our clients, while also continuing as well with my community involvement. And keeping up with all of the things going on outside of the firm as well.

Carie Hall: Rebecca, I think it's really great that you do devote so much time to all of the passions that you have, and that you've continued to do so while being successful as an associate. Because that is not an easy path to continue on. A lot of people decide that they would rather focus on getting their work done and not do as much in the community. And it's really admirable that you have been able to do both. And I think that you will be able to continue to put that work to good use, and I can see you

second chairing a trial here as soon as they start back up. So don't you worry.
{Laughs}

Rebecca Arends: Thank you.

Carie Hall: Well, it's been really fun talking about how far women in law have come. We know there are as many unique stories and experiences as there are women in the field. And we hope we've shed some light on what it takes to be successful. Perhaps offered some ideas to those new to the field, and even those who've been around a while.

Rebecca Arends: Thank you Carie, and thank you so much for sharing your incredible story. It's certainly been enlightening. And we also want to take the time and give a nod in honor to the women in law who have come before us. Those who were the first and led the way for us to follow and of course to everyone who practices law today. Both men and women, who help guide our future attorneys on their path to success.

Carie Hall: And that wraps up another episode of Legally Qualified. If you have any questions or wish to reach out to us, email us at info@Rumberger.com.

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