

Creating a 'Joyful' Law Firm Podcast Transcript

With Diana Maier of Maier Law Group and Hosted By: Davina Frederick | Published on: Oct 6, 2020

Davina Frederick: Hello and welcome to the Wealthy Woman Lawyer Podcast. Our mission is to provide thought-provoking, powerful and practical information to help you in creating your own sustainable wealth-generating law firm without overwork or overwhelm so you can live your best life. I'm your host, Davina Frederick, and I'm here today with Diana Maier, founder and CEO of Maier Law Group.

Maier Law Group is an employment and privacy law practice that provides legal advice to employers. The firm was founded on the idea that the workplace can be the means for effective social and personal change one happy employee at a time. And it's a philosophy that Diana models in her own joyful law firm. So we're super excited to have you here today, Diana. Thanks so much for being on the Wealthy Woman Lawyer Podcast.

Diana Maier: Sure, thank you for having me.

Davina: Great. So I want to start out with getting to know you and helping our audience to get to know you and kind of your journey to becoming an attorney and then ultimately, to creating your own law firm. So why don't you start out sharing that with us?

Diana's Unconventional Journey to a Career in Law

Diana: Sure. So I have probably a pretty unconventional journey to becoming an attorney because I grew up, both my parents are lawyers and neither of them was madly in love with the law, although my dad taught law for probably 40 years and did love that. But neither of them particularly enjoyed practicing that much. I guess my dad liked it for a while. But for the last 35 years or so he's done something totally different.

And so I always swore I would never go to law school. But out of college, I got involved into politics and went to college in Washington, DC and I had great, great jobs right out of college. I went to work for a lobbying organization and then I went to work for Henry Waxman in Congress as his foreign policy legislative aide. And I just, I got to see everything from the policy perspective. And I also saw that what I really missed was working with people directly one on one.

And I thought a lot about going to school and getting a Psy D degree, you're getting an LCSW. But at the end of the day, I just, I knew my personality and I knew that I might get frustrated in that role, that I might want to feel I had a little more muscle kind of behind my degree. Like not, those are very effective ways to create change. But I knew sort of from the policy perspective, and if I wanted to go down that road, that I probably needed another avenue as well.

And so I decided that I would do public interest law and work with employees, you know, work with people that way. And so I actually did go to law school for that purpose and came out of law school as a public defender for several years before I went into employment law. And that was a really gratifying career. And overall, I think it was the right choice but it was a very roundabout path to get there.

Davina: What made you choose to go into employment law after working as a public defender for so many years?

Diana: Well, I loved loved loved my job at the PD but it was just not a very sustainable position for me for a number of reasons, mostly just, it was very hard for me to have boundaries around that job. And I was ready to start a family and things like that, or, you know, wanting to get married and have a family. And I knew that the rate I was going, that was not going to happen because I was so invested in my work. So I thought about getting into civil law but I couldn't imagine anything that would be nearly as exciting as criminal defense work. And the thing that I was really passionate about other than what I was doing, was women's rights. And I thought, Oh, great, I'm going to go and prosecute sexual harassment cases and I can sort of further the causes I care so strongly about. And so that was my intention when I went into it. And originally, I actually did do plaintiff work for many years. But then, of course, I got into that work and I realized that it wasn't black or

white, that the issues were actually very gray, that it was very rare I had a case where I had an employer that was clearly a bad actor, an employee that was totally, you know, not without blame.

And so pretty soon I just thought, you know, I'm just putting more litigation in the world. I'm not sure that this is what I really want to do. So then I sort of transitioned over more preventative, non-litigation but kind of employer defense side. So it was, again, that was roundabout too. But it started from my social justice, my interest in social justice and thinking that this would be a forum from which I could stay really engaged with that work.

Davina: Yeah, yeah. What I love about your journey and your story so far is that you really have chosen very thoughtfully what it is you wanted to do. And, but also, with a listening to your heart, you know, you were really following a passion and thinking about, okay, how can I make this way that I feel, this passion that I have for social justice and then how can I take it and build my career strategically that way? And so I love that discussion.

And I want to talk about Maier Law Group and kind of the way that you practice law now. There are a couple of things that really intrigued me. One is that you have an all-female firm. And I want to talk about that because I think a lot of women listening to this will want to hear about that. And that came about because you're really seeking to help other women lawyers create a more satisfying career experience as a lawyer. So what kind of precipitated that?

Diana: Having it all women firm? Yeah, you know, it wasn't totally intentional, but I think it was about designing a firm that fit with my values. And I think my values as a lawyer, in a lot of ways, do not fit with the very patriarchal current legal system. And, I mean, I just, I don't mean the people in it, I mean, the whole infrastructure is very kind of young male based. There's not a lot of room for feminine values right now. And I, that just didn't appeal to me and that wasn't the kind of law firm I wanted to have.

And so I naturally attracted women who either had families or just wanted some balance in their lives. I think, for some reason, women, I mean, certainly part of it is the childbearing thing, but I think even women that don't have kids just are much more in touch by and large, you know, major overgeneralization, but by and large are in touch with their need for balance in ways that I think a lot of times men in law don't clue into. So I've just, I've always been attracting that kind of person.

And I, you know, I have had, I have interviewed at times men that I thought might be a really good fit. Usually, it was just the experience wasn't right. But the personality and what they wanted was a fit, but they were not the most conventional male lawyers in the world, either. So, yeah, and I, you know, and it's been great to be all women, because there's, of course, ways of interacting and things we talk about that would probably be foreign to a lot of men.

Davina: Right, right. That was one of the reasons that with my coaching women law firm owners business, when I first started doing this, I worked with men as well as women, but I eventually niche down to women because I found that when I gathered us in a group, it was a very different dynamic when we had men and women in the room versus when we had just women in the room. And the conversations were different. And it was a place for, you know, so that you create a place where women can have discussions about things that, you know, men just can't relate to, you know, because of the way our culture is set up, you know?

So what were some of the, what are some of the, I know, one of the driving factors for you in how you serve your clients and what you try to do in your own business is really creating joy and happiness. You want people to be satisfied, you want your clients to create businesses where their employees are satisfied and you want to model that and create that in your own business. So tell me some of the ways that you think people can do that.

Diana: Yeah. Well, I think one thing is perspective, right? Like not seeing everything as a zero-sum game. Seeing that you can come up with solutions that are win-win, that is the model we tried to take to employers, that making your employees happy is good for you. It's not if you give them these rights, those are rights that you're taking away from yourself. So yeah, we there's a number of things that I do, some of which were completely intentional and some of which weren't. We have a very non-bureaucratic process in the firm. Everyone has a voice and everyone's really important and I try to make people feel really important, everybody, for what their role is. And I think that I also hire people that have that same perspective. So, there

is no clear delineation between, you know, this role is not more important than this role. And we also have, and I try to have maintain very honest and open communications with people.

I, you know, last night, I had a, or yesterday I had a long meeting with all my employees, and I said something at the end that I wasn't, we were talking about some social justice issues, and I really just didn't like the way I put something. And these are issues that I really care about. And so I wrote everyone an apology and just said, You know, I said this, I really, you know, I apologize if I offended anyone.

What I meant was this, I didn't get, there was no negative reaction at the time, but I just thought about it. And I thought that was not my best self, or my best moment. And I was very conscious about, it's a good thing for me to be able to go to my employees and apologize and to be really honest and candid. I want them to feel like they can do the same thing. If they ever feel like they make mistakes. And yeah, and we just, you know, and I just try to be, I try to listen to them.

Last year, we circulated, every year, I do an upwards review. So I have kind of admin and associates review me and whoever, you know, as a partner, at the time and give us feedback. And I try to take that in last year, it was people said they really were ready to have benefits. And even though, you know, we're not the highest-grossing law firm in the world, because we have ridiculously low billable hours. There's really no billable hour requirement, but people aim for a certain amount of hours. The, I tried to roll that out, and we did it.

You know, now this year, with the climate being what it is, you know, it's tough to be maintaining those costs and everything else, but I have yet to cut those because I think they're really important. And I, you know, I rolled out a whole bunch of insurance, dental and life and disability, long term disability, and I just thought, you know, this makes, this goes with what I'm trying to do. So this makes sense. It should be a cost that we put the bill in, even if it means people will get paid a little bit less.

Davina: Right, right. So let's talk about that a little bit more, that there is a bit of a trade-off in some of the flexibility, the no billable hour requirement. You know, it's all women and you've created a very, you've created a lot of autonomy for them and a lot of flexibility and kind of not made it such a driving, like we have to work all these hours to earn all this money. And it's money goals, and this is what it's all about. You've created something that's more enjoyable so people can do the work that they enjoy and get compensated for it but it may not be top dollar. What is that tradeoff like?

Financial Rewards or Quality of Living

Diana: Absolutely. Well, it's interesting. I think it's different for different people. I mean, I think that it's probably easier for the moms, of my employees, I find that just generally they've been, first of all, they've been practicing law a lot longer a lot of times and they've been at corporate firms or they've done, you know, I have a woman who's a partner now with me who was a GC for many years. And they've, you know, she would get up and drive an hour to a job in an hour home and work long hours.

And so it's a no brainer. You know, it's like, Okay, I'm making less money, but I'm so much happier and I have so much better balance and I get to see my kids so much more. I think it's maybe a little harder for the younger attorneys. I just, and it's an interesting phenomenon too because what I see is that, so we, you know, we have a lot of times people bill, at most, say 20 hours a week, you know, out of a, and most people work, don't work more than 40 hours a week. And what I see is that then there kind of becomes this, you know, well, I, you know, I got my four hours in today, you know, that sort of, I'm done.

Like I, there's, it doesn't seem to create a sense of like, Oh, this is so great. I worked, you know, I only am billing this much. I mean definitely, there's, I think there's a lot of appreciation for what the firm offers and the flexibility and the fact that I really don't micromanage anyone. But I also see that you sort of a little bit, you know, there are trade-offs and that you create a culture around it. And then you can't just turn to people and say, okay, we really need to earn money now.

Let's all increase our billables even by an hour and a half. There's a lot of resistance to that. People aren't used to the way their day works and what they think they can bill. So it's a lot of letting go and it's a lot of just sometimes facing fact that there's no way I can pay nearly what big firms pay. And I have had a lot of attorneys tell me that looking at the time that they put in, they actually make more with me. They get paid

more, considering that they're probably working half the hours that they worked in a corporate firm or a third less hours.

So I mean, they're still lawyers and they're so you know, paid well, but it's just not, it's not going to be anything like what they'd make in a corporate firm. And not even like, you know, a lot of small firms, they do have billable requirements, 30, 35 hours a week. And we're looking at significantly less than that. So, it is, and what I see is that for the younger attorneys in particular, it can be a source of frustration that they really like the work and they like what we're doing but they want to make more money.

And it's just not really the place to do that. There's mechanisms so they can, I've tried to set up mechanisms so people can do that, like bonus plans based on work brought in and hours. But what I find, like I said, is that, you know, even though I have set something up where if you, maybe you billed more than 20 hours a week, you start getting a significant portion of what you're billing as a bonus. People haven't really been taking advantage of it. It's really interesting.

Davina: That is interesting.

Diana: Yeah. And some of it is that things can be slow. But even when times are really busy, I don't really see people going, Okay, great. I'm gonna knock out an eight-hour billable day.

Davina: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's a comfort level, you know, we rise to the level of our comfort and then once we have to, you know, if we say, Okay, I want this, I have to shift into being uncomfortable, I think it's really what challenges a lot of people with regard to growth of their firms and people who don't have this set out with intentionality.

But maybe they create their own firm because they want, they're moms and they want to have flexibility and all that, and then they feel sort of capped in the amount of money that they're making. And they could make more but it's going to require more work, more effort or more bodies or something. I mean, there's got to be a way to produce the woman hours, you know, that we need.

So, it's interesting that you have created this model, though, and you have a lot of, you know, you have a good amount of attorneys working for you and who probably were, something else has become a priority in their lives at this point, like you said, with maybe some of the moms or it could be somebody, for some other reason. It could be a parent, you know, that they need to spend more time with or whatever reason. And so they're making this choice, it's kind of a deliberate choice that they're making. So, you started something called Joy in the Law. Am I getting that right? Joy in the Law?

Diana: Yeah. Yeah.

Davina: Tell me what that is.

Joy in the Law

Diana: Yeah, so Joy in the Law was, so, I started an all-female women lawyer kind of networking group.

Actually, that's not true. I didn't start it. It was, there was an online group called Local Perennis. in the Bay Area, that is great. It's women lawyers that are either pregnant or have children. And we get on there and confer about all kinds of issues. Anyway, so I said that I wanted to get a Marin chapter.

And so, and eventually, we just basically became our own group of women lawyers in Marin, or have some affiliation with Marin and for networking purposes. And then I went, I've always been really interested in meditation. And one of my favorite meditation teachers teaches a course called Awakening Joy. It's an online course that's offered every year and it has a book by the same name. And I was just getting very into that. I took a, I did a retreat on Awakening Joy.

And when I was on that retreat, I thought a lot about how incredibly lucky I feel that as an attorney, I've really enjoyed what I've done, almost without exception. And I know that that is not the case for a lot of lawyers. And I just came back from that retreat, and I just thought, gosh, lawyers need this. They really need to know how to generate more joy.

And I came back from that retreat and I said to our group, what do you think about doing a conference on joy in the law? And they like, really liked that idea. And that was maybe late May or early June and I said, Okay, well, great. Let's due in September. I had no idea what I was about to take on, and it ended up getting kind of

taking a life of its own. It was a tremendous amount of work. But then we started that conference. And then at 1 point, one of the members of our group said, Why don't we call ourselves Joy in the Law? You know, like, this has become really our mission. This is what we're working on. Why don't we call ourselves Joy in the Law? I thought it was a great idea. And so then the groups became Joy in the Law groups and it's just kind of had its own momentum. one of my employees at the time started a San Francisco chapter of it. And now she no longer works for me but they still meet regularly. She leads that group. I'm, we, you know, we still have a, we meet, we have meetings, now they're online.

And I'm actually, I was, we were just talking about doing, so I do the conference every other year. And we were just talking about whether we were going to do it this fall or whether we were going to put it off a little bit. So there will be another conference. And then I also was realizing that I was going to maybe try out a kind of a coaching program of Joy in the Law because that's another sort of passion of mine. I thought it might be really neat to take a deep dive with some of these women if they were interested and to get into the topics that we explore on these calls.

Davina: Right. So, I think that's so interesting and fits right in with your, fits right in with what you're trying to create in your own firm. You know, some, so it's sort of a legacy of traditional law firms in a patriarchal society, you know, that law firms are about driving, you know, always driving and working. And it's a badge of honor for how much you can work.

And it's also kind of, you know, it's kind of a legacy of the 80s too, for people grew up in a had a career in the 80s and have that sort of, you know, that's the mindset we had then was whether you were in financial services, or law or whatever, right? It was always about how much you work was really a badge of honor and work became a work culture. And so we still, we see that so much in traditional law firms and big law firms. And so this is a, it's a very different way of approaching it.

You're finding, we're finding so many women, I don't know if you read the report, Walking Out the Door, it was published by the ABA, but it taught, it examines the place of women partners in law firms and how so many of them in their 50s are quitting big law. They may be partners, but they're quitting because they're finding they're just not happy, they're not satisfied because they haven't had the same type of support as their male counterparts and mentorship and the same pay and the same benefits and bonuses and things like that.

And so, I think we are seeing a lot of women lawyers now who are, they're graduating from law school and they're starting their own practices, maybe because there aren't jobs available, maybe because they have young families or they want to start families, and they want to have more autonomy and control of their time. But I think this, we're really starting to see a paradigm shift, you know? And it's kind of grassroots. And a lot of it may be happening because all that's happening in our economy and culture, you know, new generations coming along.

And they have the tools available to create virtual law firms, you know, which allows them the flexibility to work from anywhere and work with clients and meet with clients in different ways. And clients are accustomed to receiving communication and communicating with people through phones and videos and all of that. So there's a big shift that's kind of happening. And I think so much that is around what you've tapped into, people looking for a way to do this engaging work that we love but not sacrifice our health and our families at the altar of it.

Diana: Yep, I agree. I mean, to me, it's kind of a, it's kind of insanity. I don't know if you read, in the Joy in the Law, we talked a lot about an article that came out. Was it, which, who did it? Maybe it was New York Times page article about a lawyer that died of an overdose in Silicon Valley and it was written by his ex-wife. Did you see that article?

Davina: No. I did not. I'll have to look at that.

Diana: It was fascinating. It was basically all about that, you know, this was a lovely man. He was a very involved, wanted to be very involved dad and husband at the time. You know, they were divorced, but he was still, they were on cordial terms. But he worked like a dog, basically. And he would take all, you know, he would take uppers basically, to have the energy and time to do what he wanted to do, try and be there occasionally for the kids and his wife. And also just to keep up with the demands of his job.

And eventually, he kind of miscalculated whatever he was using and died. And it just, to me, I think for a lot of us just really brought home how, and that's what the article was basically about was kind of how insane it was, and how, what his life was like, and, you know, and I feel like, you know, my father practiced corporate law growing up. He was not in a huge firm, but a sizable firm, and he was a tax attorney. My dad was around. I mean, he never met any of my performances or he was home for dinner most nights.

Now, maybe that was because my father has always been really a wonderful father and that's a huge priority for him. But I don't think, I mean, that's part of it but I don't remember that at that time in my life hearing about other people that were working, you know, basically not sleeping and working around the clock. It just didn't seem like it was as acceptable as a model. And now, and I just think it's, yeah, it's kind of a temporary insanity that I'm hoping will pass.

Partially, I think we're going to have to do away with the billable hour because it's a setup, when your way of acquiring wealth is based on how much you work then, and not on the value, you know, you're generating, then it's all about you got to work crazy hours if you want to get rich. And, but yeah, and then I think that kind of, people get in that cycle and they, even though maybe over time, they care less about being rich, they're just so stuck in the cycle that they don't really know how to get out of it.

Davina: Right, right. I was listening to an interview with Kathleen Burns Kingsbury, who wrote Breaking Money Silence. She's in the financial industry world. And she was interviewing someone on her podcast of the same name, Breaking Money Silence, and the person she was interviewing was a very prosperous financial advisor.

And she was very wealthy as a result of the work. But she said, a self-described workaholic, and she was saying that, now that she's older, she's having a lot of health problems because of her prioritizing work to such a degree. And so she's starting to rethink, you know, her life and her choices. And so, you know, this podcast is Wealthy Women Lawyer. We're obviously focused on helping women create more wealth in their lives. But the, what's behind the creating more wealth is being able to really live a life that makes you happy and so that your needs are met.

And what I find with a lot of women solos who go out and start their own practices is they don't have the, enough of the business skills that they need so they're really not making enough money to take care of the basic survive, long-term survival goals and much less aspirational goals that they may have for themselves and their families because they don't take it to a business level. You know, they've become sort of freelance lawyers.

And so I'm working to kind of help them change that but the ultimate goal is so you can do things like afford retirement and afford, you know, get rid of those student loans and be able to buy your house and do those things that we have to have money to do in this society. But at the same time, there has to be a balance and you have to realize that life, there's, that you can have a lot of joy in life around things that don't involve money.

Diana: Mm-hmm. Absolutely. Right, absolutely. It's all about what, you know, what's your view of abundance, right? And I mean, I don't want to disparage, I know there are lawyers that work 80 hours a week, and they love what they do. So if that's the thing that floats your boat, great, but I just think it shouldn't be the default model. It shouldn't be something that people are forced into, unless for whatever reason, that's just what works for them.

Davina: Mm-hmm. Absolutely. So tell me about your, the work you do with your clients because I know that you're an employment law attorney and you work with employers and you also help them with privacy law matters. What kind, in what way based on the culture of your firm and the way you work, in what way are you able to take that in working with your clients and serve them in a way that may be different from other employment law attorneys?

Ensuring People are Heard

Diana: Yeah, so a lot of times, it comes down to fairly subtle things. But for example, we had a case recently where, an issue where we were advising someone and they had an employee that they liked a lot and didn't

want to let go of, but she had been out, I can't remember exactly what was going on. But she had been out on leave for quite some time.

And eventually, they decided they, and they had been good to her, but eventually, they decided they needed to, they didn't know when she was going to be back at work. And they decided that they were going to have to write her a letter saying, essentially, we're gonna have to part ways but, you know, when you're well again, you know, please, when you feel ready to work, please, you know, get in touch and we'll take you back.

And, but the way the letter was written, I just didn't feel like it conveyed a lot of compassion for how difficult a situation she was in. And so I rewrote the letter as, it was an email, actually. I rewrote it and then I sent it to them and I said, you know, you don't have to take what I've said here. This is not legal advice, per se, I said. But I do truly believe that, I said that I think that you feel these things and I think that it could be better reflected in the letter.

And I also do think, at the end of the day, this is the kind of thing that fell on lawsuits because so much of lawsuits is about people not feeling heard or not being feel, not feeling like they've been treated like a human being. I mean, nobody wants to go in a lawsuit, it's just the only muscle a lot of people feel like they have. So there's a lot of times like that where I'll suggest maybe a nuanced response or someone asks me for advice, and I'll say, Okay, here are three different options, more risky, less risky, you know, kind of talking about their tolerance for risk, but then I will definitely talk about what is sort of best for the employees and for the company overall.

And again, just continuing to remind them that thinking in these holistic terms will be good for them. And I mean, that's what I have found time and time again, is that, you know, the places that have, are good to their employees and reflect that and what they do have incredible success and are recognized and generate incredible loyalty. So that is, you know, those are some of the more subtle ways.

I mean, the other thing is that we simply, when people inquire about this, I now send out a sheet called what to know about when working with MLG Law Group, MLG. And it basically says, look, we're not your conventional law firm, if you're looking for a firm that is going to give you kind of the CYA bottom line conservative piece of advice that doesn't really take into account employees, and we're not that firm. You know, we have a different approach, you know, where you look to work with employers that really care about the well being of their employees, on and on.

And I, you know, and the point is like, we're happy to help you find the right person but we just want to let you know what you're getting into. I thought, when we generated it, I really thought, oh, gosh, we're gonna get a lot of people saying, This is, sorry, that's not why I hired a lawyer. But, you know, what I found is that people write back and say, This is exactly what I'm looking for. I mean, it's been so great, you know, this is, to see that, and that is what I think I got in touch with as a plaintiff's lawyer and why I just didn't feel right after a while to do it.

Because I am a sort of someone who sees the best in everybody. And I would see this, this attempt to want to do right by the employees and that maybe the employee missed or I thought they had missed. So, you know, I see that and I see that a lot of our employers are really good people and want to do right and they're really happy that we give them very candid, very kind of holistic, not just, I've had to sort of train out of my, you know, my kind of big firm, white-shoe corporate attorneys, I've sometimes have to train out of them.

This is the bottom line, most conservative point of view that will, you know, if they know, you want to give them options, you want to, if there's no ethical issue, then you want to be thinking about what their risk tolerance is and kind of how it affects the culture overall. But I've had to sort of train out like, this is just there's sort of one bottom line and it's like this is the most conservative thing to do.

Davina: Right. So let me ask you this. As an employer, because I know a lot of women law firm owners are discussing their own, as they're growing, they're hiring, and then they're having to fire people, transition them out, you know, whatever.

And it's become a real challenge for many of them because while they themselves created their firm because they wanted some flexibility and freedom and autonomy and those kinds of things, they're hiring people to whom they can delegate that they want to be there reliably, certain hours, and that kind of thing. And why is

it important to focus on creating a culture of happy, you know, one happy employee at a time, even in how we let them go?

Diana: Oh, I think it just makes everything better. You know, I think it just, you know, it's, there's more transparent, I mean, I think when you put out there, well, so I want to, I'm a big fan of a book called Radical Candor by Kim Scott, if you haven't read it, it's a really interesting book.

Davina: What's the name of it again?

Diana: It's called Radical Candor, CANDOR, by Kim Scott, and I really recommend it. She's just super smart, exact, who, you know, she worked with Sheryl Sandberg, she's got, she's been at all the top places. And she's incredibly lovely, like, you can just tell she's incredibly thoughtful and she very much have kind of the woman's eye on this stuff. And one of the things she talks about is that, you know, that there is this way that you, if you really care about your employees, for example, one of the things she talks about, is you don't sugarcoat.

You know, finding this fine line between not sugarcoating, in other words, you've got to have the gumption to be really candid with someone about how serious a certain problem might be, from your perspective, and you have to own that as from your perspective. And on the other hand, you know, you don't want to go into being harmful and, you know. So finding that line and kind of talking about different cultures where we've swayed one way or the other.

But one of the things she talks about is that when you put that out there, you know, all kinds of good things come from it that when you're, you know, part of being, a part of Radical Candor is you have to first get, the employee has to believe that you truly care about them. And not just as an employee, but as a person on the whole because they're not going to take your feedback in, your critical feedback in if they don't believe you're doing it in their best interest.

So I think that's just one example of the ways that, you know, having employees, and I'm not saying it's perfect, like I, you know, I've had, you know, one or two employees where I felt like nothing I did really could, I just didn't, I felt, at the end of the day, I just didn't think the firm was a fit. And there was like, I felt like there was nothing that I could do that really would make them super happy. And, or maybe law wasn't a fit. I mean, there's all kinds of things that can come up. But I think they probably knew, I hope they knew that I always cared.

And I would ask, you know, I've asked people a lot of I felt people haven't been happy. I've had number of employees that before they left, I preemptively sat down with them and said basically, what can I do to keep you on? You know, this is what I'm seeing and I want to keep you on. So I think it lends an air, there can be an air of transparency, there is trust generated, we can have real conversations, you can give, things are more efficient because you can give feedback and it can be taken in.

And I think it's just a much more enjoyable place to work. And if you enjoy where you're working, you know, you don't mind working hard and you don't, and you want to stick around. So I think there's so many reasons to do it but those are just some. I mean, of course, for me, the biggest reason is just practicing what I preach and this is something I truly believe in. And realizing I'm never gonna do this perfectly but this is my intention and I want to put it out there every day. This is my intention and try to live up to it.

Davina: Yeah, I, when you were talking about that, it brought to mind I have a mentor of mine said, you know, you're, when it, when you know that a person can no longer, that you're dissatisfied with the working relationship that you have with them in your firm and you're actually doing them a disservice if you're not frank with them and letting them go because you have already decided that there is no more opportunity within your firm for them. And you're, it's a kindness, really, to say, you know, look, we're at the end of the road here.

And I'm gonna, you know, we're going to part ways because this is going to give you an opportunity to go on and find something where it's a better fit for you as well. So, you're, there is a kindness in that and I think that so many people struggle with letting people go because they just feel guilt. Oh my god, it'd be awful if somebody fired me and I was unemployed and they're letting me go, you know, and so they keep people around longer. And when you do that, it creates actually more unhappiness for everyone within your firm.

Diana: Absolutely. That's one of the things Kim Scott talks about in her book that I just love that she says, you know, there's, it's a very humble perspective, but realizing that not every job is for every person and realizing that just because one person sucks at the job that you might have them in, they're going to be excellent at something else. And so I'm just, you know, having like being open to that and having that conversation and saying, Look, I don't think this is the right job for you. I think you have these skills and, you know, and she said that she's had so many conversations like that and they were always incredibly hard.

But so many employees came back to think or years later and just said that was like, that was the best thing that could have happened. But again, you can't do that. I mean, this, her book starts out with a story of how she had this great, this Rockstar employee that when he came to work for her, just could not do the job. And she sugarcoated and sugarcoated it until finally she fired him. And then he was flabbergasted, like it felt like out of the blue. And so she was just talking about she had didn't have the guts to basically give the feedback and how, what a disservice it was to him.

Davina: I think that can be challenging for women. I mean, you know, like, again, with a great overgeneralization, I think that can be challenging for a lot of women because, you know, we, because we are afraid of hurting somebody's feelings, we're nurturers, we are told, you know, to be nice or whatever. I mean, the culture I've grown up in, in the south, in the deep south in the United States, you know, you're to be pleasing and, you know, and have a lot of tact and sugarcoat things and you catch more flies with honey and all of that. So retraining your brain to say, you know, I can be direct, and it's okay. And it's okay if somebody gets mad.

It's alright, if somebody gets mad, I'm not responsible for, you know, somebody else's feelings, and, you know, emotions. So, it's an interesting, it's definitely an interesting topic. But we'll move on to something else because I do want to cover something else with you before we reach the end of the hour here and that is, you have your core values on your site.

And I, something I'm always talking with my clients about is the importance of really getting clear on your core values. So it's like a number one priority because then everyone you hire, every client you work with, you can tell very quickly whether or not it's going to be a good relationship or not because you can tell if their core values align with yours. And core values are really kind of deal breakers for us. You know, this is what we hold so dear. So why was it important to you to put that on your website? And were you, was it pretty easy for you to sort of come up with your core values?

Maier Law Group's Core Values

Diana: Yeah. It was in that I mean, we've refined them and refined them over the years. But it was in that we just basically sat down and brainstormed. We had the help of a great coach Heather Hubbard, who I know you know, who just completely serendipitously was, we found her and she, at the time, her coaching practice was, you know, and she's a, she's been a top lawyer and all of that and now is coaching women on business development and kind of having a career of their dreams. And she, it was something about joy, the Language of Joy was her brand for a while.

And so when she came to work with us, I flew her out to work with us for a weekend and kind of get, do some goal setting strategy for the year. She talked to us about knowing what our core values were. And so we, and we just sat down and we just agreed, you know, yeah, we all just a given, we all really express a lot of appreciation for one another. We love that when we get that from our clients. We really try and give our clients that. So we just, it was pretty easy, but it was just kind of refining it over the years and just sort of make making sure they still, they still feel relevant and reflect.

And, you know, in terms of putting it on the website, you know, I guess, I'm trying to remember what, why I did that. I think it was partially just because I thought it was such an important part of how we ran and how we function that I thought it was important for people to know that, you know, this is where we come from and this is the perspective you're going to get. And also, just like everything else, it's a reminder to us that these are the things that we want to use in our day to day interaction.

Davina: Right, right. I couldn't agree with you more. I mean, it's one of the things, when I'm working with my clients, I recommend that they create their core values and that they publish them everywhere. They hang

them up in the office, you know, if they have an office, put them on a, you know, frame that and put it up and so people, so your prospective clients can see that. And your clients can see that and your employees can see that as a daily reminder and put it on your website.

And because that really communicates who you are and your brand and what you believe in and what you stand for. And you're more likely to attract those team members and clients that are, that's going to resonate with, that these are going to resonate with, you know? So you'll, being happy, it's part of happiness, you know? You'll be happier in what you're doing if you're working more with people who are, you know, also share these values that are like-minded in that way, right? So that's why I think it's so important.

And I noticed, you know, that's one of the things that you had on your website. I'm like, Oh, this does not surprise me because you are, you know, so rooted in this concept and philosophy of creating a joyful law firm, joyful work experience. I really appreciate you being here today and sharing with us. It's been such a pleasure talking with you. How can we find out more information about you and the firm and how can we connect with you?

Diana: Yeah, so I'll just give you, I'll start with this, so the firm URLs, it's maierlawgroup.com and there's a lot of information there. And it's MAIERlawgroup.com, maierlawgroup.com. And we have all kinds of stuff there, free resources and blog and things like this podcast will go up there eventually. And then if you want to learn more about Joy in the Law, it's just joyinthelaw.com.

And then you can always email me directly, DIANA@maierlawgroup.com if you want to, you know, ask me questions, or you want to join Joy in the Law or anything like that. And those are, and then we, you know, we have all the, we have a LinkedIn presence. And we have various social media presence. Yeah, but those are the main ways.

Davina: And it looks like there are links on the website to that too. So if they go to the website, they can probably link to your Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, those kinds of things. I really appreciate you being here and sharing with us today. I think you've provided a different perspective for our audience and gives them some things to think about in their own practice and what they want to create. And they can have the type of law firm that they want to create. They don't have to be stuck in models that don't work for them or don't fit. So I thank you so much for being here and sharing.

Diana: Thank you so much for having me. It was a real pleasure.