

Welcome to the Vandenack Weaver legal visionaries podcast brought to you by interactive legal here's your host Mary Vandenack.

Welcome to today's episode of Vandenack Weaver, legal visionaries, a weekly podcast discussing updated legal news, evolving methods of providing legal service and law practice issues. My name is Mary Vandenack founder and managing partner at Vandenack Weaver, LLC. I'll be your host. As we talk to experts from around the country about closely held business tax trusts and estates, legal technology, law firm, leadership, and wellbeing. Before we start today's episode, I want to thank our sponsors. Here's a word from one of our sponsors, interactive legal.

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The right reflection is an executive coaching firm, specializing in helping leaders achieve their highest potential by developing both their inner and outer game of leadership. Sometimes people do not think of themselves as leaders because they aren't in a traditional leadership role, but most people are leaders in one sense or another. And leadership is challenging these days. If you would like to improve your skills, check out the [rightreflection.com](http://rightreflection.com) today today's episode is on dealing with gaslighting in the workplace. My guess is Pam Hernandez, the founder and CEO of the right reflection, a coaching firm specialize in helping leaders achieve their highest potential. Her focus is developing both the inner game and the outer game of leadership. And I would say as somebody who has had the opportunity to work with Pam, that it extends beyond leadership. I think you are Cote. You can coach people on a lot of different skills in terms of how to function and be well in the workplace and strategies and things like that as well. But thanks for joining us here today, Pam,

It's great to be here and yes, somehow, uh, leadership doesn't really encompass, everything that I do, but, I do focus basically. My definition of leadership is creating outcomes that matter to you and obviously wellness and things matter to you.

So how I functioned through my day in a way, whether I'm using a standing desk and sitting desk even can be part of that, right? So, you know, as you do know, I'm passionate about wellness and it's been something as I've been working on my personal brand that I had been told, well, that's a really important part of your personal brand. And so, I started, it was suggested to me to post on the different areas of my

brand. So, part of that is, Hey, my trust tax and estate attorney. So, posts on some of those issues. I'm well known for technology and law practice management. So, I'll post on some of those issues. And everybody knows that I'm also passionate about wellness. And interestingly I've written a column on wellness for 20 years. The posting on LinkedIn on wellness issues was like really having myself out there in a zone.

And then as I did that, I got re you know, emails and letters and notes and calls from people all over the country saying, thank you so much for doing that. It really matters that an established attorney is going to get out there on these subjects and make a difference. And so that's why I thought it was important to include in this podcast. Some addressing some of the issues, but one of the topics that came up a lot as I started to do some posting, I think it was partly from a NAMI post that I did where it talked about the concept of gaslighting. And so that's today's topic. So, can you just tell us what is gaslighting Pam? Okay,

Well, gaslighting is just a very specific type of bullying, but it is bullying. And the term comes from an old movie called Gaslight in the forties where Charles [inaudible] is trying to drive his wife, Ingrid Bergman, crazy on a side note, she did win the Oscar for this

Throughout. And I think she turns things around in the end here

Throughout the film. He manipulates her to make her feel as if she's going mad. And of course, it's set in the past. So, one of the things does, is he turns down the gas lamps in the house and she notices and comments on it. And he goes, no nothing's happened. You're, you're, you're imagining that. And so that term has come very popular lately where one person is trying to make another person question themselves or their perception of realities or their memories. You know, an example might be someone saying, I never said that, or you're way too sensitive, or you must have misunderstood me. I was just kidding.

So, as I understand it, gaslighting can occur in different types of relationships. So, the movie that you're talking about that was a husband and wife relationship, right. And that's a common one that is going to occur in, in that type of w where we're all do you see?

Well, and that's the one we most think of in it is, probably one of the one tools that abusers will use in intimate relationships. It could, because it's a way of controlling, uh, the other person and getting them to doubt, what am I going crazy? Or it must be me. So, you see it in intimate relationships. You can see it in friendships I remember, you know, watching young people as they were growing up, and there'd always be this kind of sharp comment than, oh, I'm just kidding. Can't you take a joke, but you're wondering, okay, is there another level of that? And all too often, you'll see it in the workplace. And, gaslighting is just a reflection of culture.

So, you can have sort of a gaslighting culture, so to speak where we're all hyper competitive and we're going to cut throats. And so, this is one of the things that get, gets used in this culture. So, can you give a few examples of workplace gaslighting?

Sure. It can be done in public, like you're in a meeting and someone will just kind of make a sharp remark and under and, oh, I thought you had done such and such and you hadn't am, but yet to come on too strong, especially for a woman in the workplace to come on strong and defend yourself, then you'll be seen as the person who was, oh, you're so sensitive. Don't take it seriously it can happen behind your back. And this happens a fair amount to me in my career someone will come in and basically try to stir up things. You know, she's just so hard to work with me. She hardly ever returns my phone calls and, uh, you know, it's like they're trying to plant seeds about somebody and so it can happen there. It can happen in public sarcasm can be used. And actually, even though this is a little outside, the really strict definition of, uh, gaslighting, I've seen it used when it talks about how people are excluded, you know, ,, uh, all the important conversations happen on the golf course, or there's the good old boys club and you're not invited or there's a ceiling and you're excluded, that doesn't fit the exact parameters. But again, it's a way, but then you say, how come I didn't hear about that, uh, opportunity or how come I didn't hear about that conference? Well, because

We didn't think you cared.

Yes. We don't know.

We didn't know you golf. Yeah. Even though you're a scratch golfer. Yeah.

Yeah. So, it's that kind kind of thing. I know very early in my career I used to complain that, oh my God, every important decisions made in the restroom and I had the restroom all to myself because I was in the women's restroom, but as guys were washing their hands, walking out and all of a sudden we have a new policy.

Yeah. We call our restroom the back-conference room. Yeah. I think that's really, true. So how about like, this is what I see. And especially since I become managing partner, I will have somebody in my firm come to me and start saying, you know, Janie is really whiny Janie, really like, you know, she plays on Facebook all day, Janie really like, does this and that, or just, you know, kind of criticizes that person. And you know, what I learned to do is to go, I never really, I'm one who never listens to what somebody tells me about somebody else. I'm like an always get to know that individual. Now I think that's one of the things that I

struggle with is that people will hear something somebody else said and whatever their truth and perception is, you know, cause sometimes it's really a perception versus gaslighting, right.

Somebody might just see somebody is in competent because they know how to work with them. So, you must ultimately distinguish. And so I think that my understanding, and you can clarify this for me, is that the difference between say gaslighting and just, you know, having a bad day or not really having a good perception about what's going on is that it's persistent. So, I watched for the person who, you know, I had a gal that worked for me that didn't like another paraprofessional there. And so, she's in my office once a week. Well, you know, Janie, like didn't get her stuff done, you know, or Janie, doesn't see him. And it's like week after week or week. Is that correct? That that's gaslighting is persistent rather than, you know, anybody could have a bad day and right. Say something negative.

That's true. And the, and the nut, another thing about that kind of negative gossip coming in is even when it is gaslighting is kind of stopping it in its tracks. one thing I, a woman I hired back at my former company, she was a master of stopping gossip and I, and I loved it. And so, someone comes and says, well Jane is not getting back to me on my emails. Really. I've never had that issue with her and stuff. Maybe we should go talk to her and see if there was something that came up. And if it's not truly an issue, it's just gossip that tends to stop it.

We are going to take a brief break from our episode for a word from one of our sponsors, Carson, private client

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Okay, let's continue our episode. And so, there's gas lighting, which is making somebody doubt their own reality type of thing, right. Change perception. And there's also triangulation. So that example you gave could be either of those in some sense, right? Sometimes they're trying to get in your good graces and have this relationship with you and keep this other person out of it. Right. So how do you kind of know is the person, especially if you're, I think that if you're a good intention, you're a good person. Sometimes you're susceptible to gaslighting cause you're not expecting it. So how do you start to become aware of it?

Well, I think you hit on it with the idea that it's persistent and the fact that it's often unfounded. ,, and so is, is this person and it's oftentimes one person always seems to get a jab in and, and things. So then that, uh, uh, and especially the, the fact that it's not valid, wait, wait a minute. I did this report. Uh, you know, I turned it in on time. Uh, the supervisors said that, so, but maybe I'm missing something because I'm new here.

So, if you think you're being gaslighted at work, what do you do?

Wow, that is tricky. And I will not give any blanket advice because there are lots of things that, that happens for one thing. It depends on who you are in the organization and who the gas lighter is. Uh, and if the gas lighters in a position of power, that power dynamic, you know, so you could talk back to him, well, or her, are they in a position, in a position to retaliate? Is that gonna ramp up the gas lighting? if you confront them and is it usually one-on-one or is it in a group? sometimes you can have success by going and sitting down and talking with the gas lighter. But again, this is a courageous conversation and with any courageous conversation there's risk, but I have gone and said, you know, could we talk, Mary I've noticed in meetings, you seem to find a lot of fault with the reports, I'm doing those kinds of thing.

Could you help me understand why that is? And if they're truly something well then, and, but the sub message there is I noticed, and I'm not afraid to come talk to you about it. Now that though you do have to kind of keep in mind that you know, it could have ramifications. Now a lot of people will say, oh, go to HR. And I mean, I was VP of HR at my company for a while. And but you do have to be careful with that too. How are things handled? and not all and not all companies, uh, are they handled well? And now we're back to culture though, is this one person, or is this the culture is, and you know, cultures, how we do things around here, but culture is also what behaviors rewarded and what behavior is tolerated. So, if it's done in public and the bosses just kind of sit there and smile because they almost like to see people, then you realize that may limit your choices. Okay.

So, what you must do is going to vary based on sort of who the gas lighter is, this guy runs company. Yeah. That's a problem. Yeah. Right. And as I understand, most gas sliders when confronted will defend their behavior and often will in fact, retaliate, you must be a little concerned if you've really identified, it's a Gaslight. Right.

Well, see, that's, that's why gaslighting is such an effective way to bully because you have easy deniability, what do you mean? I didn't say that. Or, you know, you took that wrong. And so, it's like me thinks that death protests too much. And so, it's hard and it's nuanced and you must go in with a clear head of what's at risk. Now, if you have a choice, you know, perhaps you start looking for a law firm where the culture is

a little bit better. If you don't, you must learn how to somewhat protect yourself in mitigate the negative effects.

Because I know they say in personal relationships, whether it's a friendship or an intimate relationship, that a lot of times you just, ultimately you try the confrontation approach, being aware of the fact that the gas letter is likely to defend themselves, likely to retaliate and likely to accelerate the behavior because of the nature of the person who gaslights. Right. And so, in the work situation, that's kind of the same and it's tougher because now you're dealing with your income. And so, confronting the gas letter while you know, different things in the HR. There's I think a better thing, but the gas slider is gaslighting is so subtle and kind of crazy making. And they're good at the, a lot of times. They're good at making others agree with them in terms of, yeah, this person's really a little off this person's a little and for whatever reason, people attend, well, sometimes believe that. So, you may be fighting a battle, like other people may not see what you see, which is some of the crazy making of it. So, if you take, like what about documenting what's going on?

Oh, yes and that's one of the ways you protect yourself is, and if, if you know, someone's going to ,, perhaps gaslit you in a meeting or after the meeting, if it's just between the two of you, it becomes a, he said, he said, and so docketing, even following up with an email and I got, so I did this quite a bit in my career. I'd say, uh, Mary, great to meet with you day, just to document these were our concerns. This is what we agreed on. And this is what I will be going forward with. If you have anything different, let me know. I would though oftentimes take someone to the meeting with me and I would pass it off as well. They're the real subject matter expert when it comes to comps. So, I want them to be here or I'm helping her learn to understand this.

So, I want him to be here because then if it eventually does escalate, you've got a witness. I also had someone who gaslighted my whole division and it wasn't the CEO, but it was someone of a fair amount of importance. And I knew he was gaslighting me because of things the CEO would say, and the CEO wasn't gaslighting him. So, I went and had a meeting with him, and I said, I know, uh, this person has difficulties with my, with this division and he'll come and tell you, tell you things. And I certainly am the first to admit that we have XYZ issues. Could you do me the favor though, when he comes and shares derogatory information with you, could you come ask me about it? Cause I have a feeling it's incomplete and I will be honest about our failings, but I just want to make sure you have a complete picture. But again, those things are totally dependent on the relationships you've built, uh, within the organization. So

Might work well. If you've been around built relationships might not work so well if you're newer to the organization, right? But let's say that at some point you're in an organization, law firm, whatever the case might be and you're being gaslighted and you kind of look, you do in the documentation. You're looking going, yeah. If I raise this issue or confront, I'm going to be so out of here and at this moment I can't afford to, I've got two kids at home. My spouse just lost a job. I got to keep this job on track. And so isn't there the possibility let's say, you know, finding outside support my understanding. It's really important that if

you know, you're being gaslighted and you're in a situation that you can't do anything about it right now, you need to know what the reality is so that they're not able to play that game on you. You need to have that strong sense of self perception. So, what's that a support group, a coach like you?

Well all the above would, be that way, but one of the best, and this is a technique I learned in a former life as a classroom English teacher. And that is your best form of classroom management is to get the students on your side, because if they're on your side, they like, they respect you. They want to learn; they will manage the troublemakers for you. And that also can happen in the workplace. So, building those lateral relationships, uh, support staff relationships, if there's someone above is just , it's good. It's, it's just, it's, it's a good idea. All the way around. You'll be, be a better, uh, employee. But then when people try to undercut you, they're more likely to say, well, wait a minute. That's not the Mary. I know.

And so, in a law firm, build those relationships with clients, to you, let people get to know you and know who you are. And even if you're an introvert, say, instead of going in your office, closing your door, and hiding, show yourself and let people know really who you are. So that this person who's saying, you're something else isn't gonna be able to pull that off. Exactly. So, any last comments, Pam? ,,

Yes. This is one of the hardest things to deal with, but I had one case where this woman, she was such a good leader and so strong, and she was being gaslighted by a colleague to the point that she was, she was ready to quit. And unfortunately, when you're being gas lit like that, sometimes that's the only thing you see. And so, I did some work with her and her whole department on strategic planning. And afterwards I said, do you realize that the 11 other people in this room love you and respect you and want you to share your knowledge? All you're doing is focusing on that one person. And if you can focus on the others and I saw her several months later and he had lost his power because there were two Gaslight. You must have somebody to engage with.

So, you were able to reshift and a gas lighter can get all your focus and you miss what's around you. And so, you really need to focus on what else is around you. Well, thanks so much for sharing on this important topic today, Pam, I really appreciate you being here. Thank you. As we get to the end of our episode, I want to thank our sponsors, interactive, legal, and Carson, private client. That's all for now. Thanks for listening to this week's episode and stay tuned for our weekly releases,

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