

Speaker 1 ([00:03](#)):

Welcome to the Vandenack Weaver legal visionaries podcast with your host Mary Vandenack.

Speaker 2 ([00:13](#)):

Welcome 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 talked to experts from around the country about closely held business tax, trust estates, legal technology, law firm, leadership and wellbeing for lawyers. For our first episode, we decided to turn things around a little and have someone interview me. My guest today is Cheri Duryea, president of Duryea strategic marketing, and she is going to interview me about my background, the law profession, and why I wanted to do this podcast. Thank you for joining us today, Sherry.

Speaker 3 ([01:01](#)):

You bet. Thanks Mary. I appreciate the opportunity. Let's jump right in. Shall we? Absolutely. So let's start by learning a little more about you. I know your very first job was training thoroughbred, horse, race horses. How did you go from there to founding your own law firm

Speaker 2 ([01:18](#)):

With a horse racing was a family business as was lost. So I think I was just destined to be involved in family businesses. In some matter I got out of the racing, I considered a whole lot of careers. I actually didn't want to be a lawyer because everybody else in my family was a lawyer. So I considered social work and journalism and teaching and went through quite a few majors. Finally, I decided maybe I should talk to a career coach and do an interview. And so I did that and I, the one thing I said to her was I absolutely don't want to be a lawyer because everybody else in my family has a lawyer. When she came back with the results from the testing, she looked at me a little sheepishly and she said, well, you're a perfect fit to be a lawyer, but I don't.

Speaker 2 ([02:02](#)):

I know you don't want to be one. So let's talk about the other options. Well, we decided that, okay, we're going to go ahead with law. And so, I ended up going to law school, a, graduated from law school. It turned out some really big jobs. I happened to be fortunate to do really well, but my dad at the time was 62 years old. And I thought, well, if I'm ever going to work with him as a lawyer, both of my brothers were actually working with him as well. It's now. And it was the best decision I ever made because I got to spend five years there and then he got cancer and died. So that was in a whole lot of ways, just one of the best things I ever did in my life.

Speaker 3 ([02:38](#)):

That's great. I'm so glad you got to spend that time with him. So why was it important to you to start your own firm and what's different about Vandenack Weaver?

Speaker 2 ([02:48](#)):

So I think that, you know, I grew up in the family business and when I started practicing law, I was part of a family law firm. And that is really what mattered to me. I grew up my life around, you know, the people who came to our house where a lot of my dad's clients and friends, and after he passed away,

my brother and I, who were still in the firm, we're trying to make things go. But we were both at tough lifetimes. I'd been through a divorce. He'd been through a divorce. Our office was out in the middle of nowhere in the country. So it was hard to recruit people. They couldn't figure out that you could run a sophisticated law practice. I think people would understand that today, I joined a big firm and there was just a little less focus there on long-term relationships, the focus, some refer to it as transactional law, where they see a client.

Speaker 2 ([03:38](#)):

One time it's a transaction in and out. I really wanted a relational law firm. I really wanted to have things sink in the way, kind of with my value. So I was once told when your lifestyle and your values are in sync, that's when you flourish. And you're happy when your lifestyles and values are not in sync, then you're miserable. So I wanted to have a law firm that had an environment where my values and my lifestyle could be in sync. And that's why we established the firm that we did and created core values. And our number one core value is people. And that's whether it's our clients or the people who work for us. I think you talked to some of our clients, or you talked to some of the people who worked from RSU here that we really honor that the other thing is we want it to be innovative and law by its nature is not very innovative.

Speaker 2 ([04:26](#)):

It's sort of, you know, rule oriented, the, got to do this, got to do that. And my first partner, I were both tech geeks and we really wanted to use technology. And I was at some firms where there's a lot of talk about technology, but not very much use of it. And so when my partner and I left were like, we're taking our laptops and we started our firm in a basement and we're like, it's going to be us and our laptops. And we're going to live happily ever after. Of course we did grow a little bit, but we have stayed small and we have stayed techie. We care a lot about integrity. That really mattered to me. I assumed that was everywhere in the world only to find out that, you know, there's a lot of use of that term. We really wanted to live by that as well as accountability we expect, we actually hold our clients accountable. If they say they're going to do this or that, we expect that from them just as we hold ourselves accountable inside. And we really want it to be on the industry forefront. You know, we don't want to be talking like reacting behind things, but we want to really be on the cutting edge of what's going on in the legal industry, provide great service. And currently diversity's always been among our core values, but that's become a really important thing right now.

Speaker 3 ([05:34](#)):

You're very involved at a national level with organizations like American bar association and a C T E C. I'm not even sure how to say that and are a nationally recognized speaker and writer. How did that come about?

Speaker 2 ([05:49](#)):

And it's ACTech, which is the American college of trust in a state console.

Speaker 3 ([05:54](#)):

I am not an attorney. That's why I didn't know.

Speaker 4 ([05:56](#)):

That's right. It's I'm glad

Speaker 2 ([05:58](#)):

You said that. Cause it was a good thing to bring up rather than a lot of times, as a lawyer, we talk in acronyms and everybody's like, well, what does that mean? And so you have just written ACTech without explaining what that meant. But I like to say that getting involved in obtaining national recognition was part of my strategic plan from the beginning. But what actually happened is after my dad passed away, after five years of practicing with him, I joined big firm. Number one, it wasn't a great fit. I joined big firm two and they're great law firms don't get me wrong. They just weren't a good fit for me. And then I joined law firm, number three, and it still wasn't a good fit for me. And so after going through three law firms in short order, it'd be, you'd go to an event locally. And there's all my friends, former partners.

Speaker 4 ([06:45](#)):

And it was just very uncomfortable. So I thought, well, I think I'm just going to go to some of these national

Speaker 2 ([06:50](#)):

Organizations and events. I started going to the American bar association tech show meeting and the American bar association law practice meetings and some of the tax meetings. And, and you know, the story I like to tell is that I went to a business section meeting just because I heard they had the best food. And I was sitting at the table eating some of the great food at the business section. And all these lawyers came and sat up and started talking to me, introducing themselves. And one attorney had read something I'd written and said to me, you are an excellent writer and you should have that published in Lindberg services. I kind of laughed at the time thinking what Lindberg, that's like, you know, the best service there is two weeks later, I was aligned commentator and that's kind of how that started. And the other thing is I had some great people that I met through attending those organizations at the time I was had a young son at home and one of my favorite stories is there were two guys that I met at a dinner in Chicago and they thought I had skill set.

Speaker 2 ([07:52](#)):

They followed my career. And several years later when my son was about 14, they called me and they said, you know, Mary we've been following your career. And we know your son isn't quite out of the house yet, but we've been trying kind of waiting until he was older and we have a position for you that you can take on and it will get you involved at a national level and a little bigger scale. And then when your son's actually out of the house, if you want to be involved in a little bigger way, then that opportunity will be paid. The, you know, the road will be paid for that opportunity. So two weeks later I was on a plane to a meeting in Cape Cod, which was cool.

Speaker 4 ([08:30](#)):

Wow, this is kind of fun. So that got me involved.

Speaker 2 ([08:34](#)):

And as I got more involved, you know, I actually ultimately became the editor for law practice magazine, which was an amazing way to get in touch with all the issues related to my profession because we cover technology. We cover leadership, we cover innovation. We had an issue called big ideas. And I actually got to start a wellness column in that magazine. I became a member of the tech show board. And so that puts you in touch with all the legal technology across the country. And actually internationally. I

also got involved in wellness, you know, my son and I are survivors of the Millard south shooting. And so that was always a little passionate about the shooting issues and trying to get involved in something that mattered. So I got involved in a presidential appointment to the American bar association youth at risk commission, but then because of my knowledge and technologies and all that, the president of the American bar asked me to serve on what they call the commission on the future of the profession, which was an amazing experience because I got to touch so many different people from so many different areas of the law who are trying to make a difference.

Speaker 2 ([09:39](#)):

That's amazing all brought together because of good food. So the lesson there is go where the best food. Exactly.

Speaker 4 ([09:49](#)):

That's great. I'll, I'll do that

Speaker 3 ([09:51](#)):

From now on, I know technology is something that's been an important element Vandennack Weaver for a long time. And how has the use of technology changed the legal profession?

Speaker 2 ([10:02](#)):

Well, in a strange way, technology has been slow to be adopted by the legal profession, which has been one of my frustrations because one of my concerns is that if lawyers don't really get on board with technology, there's going to be others in the industry that will find a way to use technology to serve our client base. So that's been, one of my mantras to lawyers is get on board with the use of technology. The pandemic actually had a pretty significant effect. And what we've seen is that technology has evolved quite a bit just because of that. So we are seeing virtual law firms pop up. I know that I gave several webinars during the pandemic where lawyers still weren't paperless. So there was a group of us that were coaching lawyers. Okay, let's get you paperless. Even some lawyers who could work outside the office were used to having support in the office and when they're separated, it was different.

Speaker 2 ([10:56](#)):

So we've seen a lot of adoption just in the last year and a half and a significant evolution. And I think that will continue to improve. One of the things we're seeing, a lot of development is artificial intelligence, which I think will improve the effectiveness of law and another areas that we're seeing new business models. So fall of. So we're actually involved ourselves in developing a virtual law firm where we can have lawyers in other parts of the country as part of our law firms. So we don't all have to be in the physical space that we are in Omaha, Nebraska, but we can have a bigger firm. And that's a trend that you're see seeing going on.

Speaker 3 ([11:34](#)):

That's amazing. You know, I'm also from a family of lawyers, as you know. So thinking back, growing up with going into their offices and stacks of paper and books everywhere, that's a whole new concept.

Speaker 2 ([11:46](#)):

I don't even have a book in my office anymore.

Speaker 4 ([11:49](#)):

You don't need it.

Speaker 3 ([11:52](#)):

Let's change gears, little wellness and life balance is important to you. You mentioned this earlier a little bit in some of your, comments, and I know you used to teach Pilates and you practice yoga. It's one of the topics that you talk about at conferences. Why do you feel this is so important for attorneys?

Speaker 2 ([12:10](#)):

And I think it's important, not just for attorneys, but really for everyone, but my profession is a very challenging profession. There's a lot of hours. It's a lot of demands. You have to be perfect. There's no margin for error. If I'm dealing with helping somebody with their estate planning involves millions of dollars. I can't be a zero off after, you know, before or after that decimal or it's a huge issue. So I have to be on the way that the business works is you can sit there one day and you're worrying about, am I going to have any work to do? And then 25 people call you the next morning and all of their issues are urgent. So there's a high, it's a high level of stress and to kind of keep myself balanced and I'm pretty intense. And people joke about me being a type AAA. And I probably, it's probably a fair thing.

Speaker 4 ([13:02](#)):

You, do like yoga

Speaker 2 ([13:06](#)):

Intense of a personality, you've got to find a way to balance that out. And so I've practiced yoga for a long time, which is good for the physical body. Because as a lawyer, you spend a lot of time at a desk with your hands in front of you at a computer or on a telephone or these days on zoom calls. And so the yoga balances, the effects on the body and on the mind, the place is great for core. And now that I'm getting a few days older, I'm counting how important it is that my core remain stable. So you that, and the other is just mindfulness, which is so important is to stop and take a breath. I had a meeting this morning that got really intense. And one of the guys at the meeting knows me, and we've actually shared in mindfulness practice. And he looks at me and goes, and he's actually used to me from yoga and mindfulness rather than in the meeting room. And so he's looking at me and he goes [inaudible]

Speaker 2 ([14:04](#)):

To make that, I mean, that's been part of my life passion for a long time, because particularly frankly, women leave the profession because they find a little bit of a struggle with the balance. But I think it's both men and women may this past well, we're at the end of that is we're recording this today, but was attorney wellbeing week. And I dragged a lot of people into that on the national level. And so in an effort to be super supportive of them, I was posting a lot of information on attorney wellbeing week during that time period. It's also mental health month may is. And so I am involved in some of those organizations, particularly through my youth at risk. And I serve on the boys town advisor, fundraising board here in town. And so I just care a lot about mental. It's such an issue and still a stigma related to it.

Speaker 2 ([14:54](#)):

Right. It's just absolutely insane. So I started getting these emails and messages and calls from across the country. When I started doing some posts, I always felt like I was putting myself a little out there when I did it on LinkedIn. Like I'm posting on LinkedIn about wellness, but the amount and volume of responses I got from women and one woman wrote me this amazing email that I printed out and saved, which just talked about, I am so grateful that someone like you, who is established nationally would actually speak up on this issue because if those of you in your position, don't speak up, nothing in this profession is ever going to change. And she does. I don't know if you can make a difference, but I am so grateful that you're willing to try. And when I got that message along with many other similar to that, kind of my conclusion was that is such an issue yet in my profession. I know it is in others as well that we are going to make that part of this podcast too.

Speaker 3 ([15:50](#)):

That is amazing to get that acknowledgement. Must've felt really good too.

Speaker 2 ([15:55](#)):

It did. And I hoping that we can really make a difference with the information that we put out there.

Speaker 2 ([16:01](#)):

Thanks for listening to our introductory episode and stay tuned for our weekly releases

Speaker 1 ([16:14](#)):

Hurrrdat media production.