

Alumni Reflections: Professional Evolution and the Transformative Power of Collaboration and Mentorship with Christine Lazatin and Krista Whitaker

October 4, 2023

Alumna [Krista Whitaker](#), currently vice president, associate general counsel at the Miami Heat, and [Christine Lazatin](#), a sports partner in our corporate department, developed a close kinship during their years together at Proskauer. In this candid conversation, Krista and Christine dig into the impactful lessons they have learned, embracing the importance of mentorship, the delicate balance and special power of motherhood, and the pivotal role they play as custodians of culture in their organizations.

Christine: After so many years and so many hours together, I always relish a chance to see you and catch up. We were so lucky to have you for all those years and we will dig into some of our war stories, but first tell us about when the opportunity to join the Miami Heat entered the picture.

Krista: Miami came into the picture quite spontaneously. I wasn't actively looking to leave Proskauer. However, if I ever did consider a move, it had to make sense for my family and align geographically. I also wanted to find an organization that offered the things I had come to love during my time at Proskauer. Apart from the incredible work that I handled, there are so many other things that really completed my professional life. Being able to volunteer, being able to get involved with the community, having mentorship opportunities – both mentoring people, but also being mentored. We spend so much time at work and to be able to also do other things that you care about with your colleagues and as an extension of your professional life, is important to me and that's something I found at the Miami Heat as well.

Mentorship played a significant role during my time at Proskauer, and Christine, I would not be the lawyer I am today without you and everything that you taught

me. It's not just the technical aspects in relation to the law, but all the conversations and all the moments in between.

Krista Whitaker, Vice President, Associate General Counsel, Miami Heat

Christine: Can you talk a little bit about all the activities and outreach that you did during your time at Proskauer? You're already finding new touchpoints and making an impact in Miami despite everything on your plate.

Krista: During my time at Proskauer, I was involved in various pro bono projects, including housing, U visa filings and assisting non-profits. However, a significant portion of my involvement revolved around the Black Lawyer Affinity Group. As a Co-Chair, I dedicated much of my time to recruiting efforts and developing mentorship programs in collaboration with local law schools. I participated in corporate responsibility initiatives and community outreach. Through Proskauer, I joined a mentorship program with a local non-profit and mentored a student for four years, supporting her from freshman year until her graduation and acceptance into Cornell University. We also established a sports, business, and law clinic for the same non-profit, providing students with exposure to different professions, an opportunity to hone their analytical and public speaking skills, and opening doors to various opportunities. For instance, the students came in and were able to study a fact pattern of trying to bring an NBA team to a new city. They had good facts, bad facts, and had to get up and analyze them and make a public presentation. It was an incredible experience.

Christine: Speaking of training and development, can you talk a little bit about what it was like when you first entered the arena at Miami?

Krista: One key factor that greatly contributed to my growth was having access to mentors, at all levels. I could rely on them for guidance and to bounce around ideas. I learned to tailor my approach based on the nature of each relationship – whether it was a close bond or based on day-to-day interactions. At Proskauer, for instance, mentors like you, who specialized in my practice area, offered tailored advice on specific projects. Moreover, as an amazing working mom, I could turn to you for insights on juggling my personal and professional life. My experience at Proskauer taught me the value of reaching out for support and acknowledging the expertise of others. Starting a new career path at the Heat affirmed just how critical it is to have that support backing. My mentors provided fresh perspectives and insight that helped me (and continue to help me) make informed decisions, regardless of whether they are major or minor.

Christine: And what was the hardest part of the transition to in-house life? How did you make your way through it?

Krista: At first, I felt like I was drinking from a fire hose for several months. Working in a general practice group, particularly in corporate law at Proskauer, exposed me to a wide range of legal areas. From media rights to finance and governance, the Sports Group provided me with such a diverse skill set, enabling me to jump right in. Transitioning in-house, though, I quickly realized how many areas of the law impact the business and the reliance on in-house counsel to understand how the various legal aspects intersect with the business. It's a common misconception that lawyers have answers to everything, but the truth is that we all have our areas of expertise. In an in-house role, the legal department becomes a crucial resource for the entire business operations team. Learning to navigate which matters I can handle independently and when to seek external expertise has been a key challenge.

Christine: So, you finally stopped drinking from the fire hose, you come up for air, you feel fully situated and then you have this marvelous new life event that turns your world back upside down. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Krista: Yes! In August 2021, my husband and I welcomed our baby girl. Her name is CJ. So, yeah, I moved to a new city, I started a new job, I had a baby. There were a lot of life transitions happening.

Christine: I always tell people that becoming a mom made me better at my job, because it gave me greater perspective. It made me think more about the big picture. How did CJ change your life?

Krista: In a lot of ways! My current boss — she has three children of her own — always says your time is not your own anymore. And I certainly felt that in taking care of a newborn infant and now running around after a toddler! I think the big picture kind of thinking, knowing what is important in terms of priorities for your family, for your career, and for yourself is something that has changed for me. I also think I must really be intentional about how I spend my time and what takes my energy these days.

I'm incredibly proud and thrilled to see so many of my mentees not only find their dream jobs within the industry, but also find themselves equipped with all of the necessary technical and mental tools to absolutely crush it at those jobs starting on Day 1. You are the epitome of that. You have achieved so much already, professionally and personally, and you're just getting started. Watch out, world!

Christine Lazatin, Partner, Proskauer

Christine: How would you say that Proskauer affected your career?

Krista: Proskauer taught me a valuable lesson: finding and balancing what truly matters to me, both professionally and personally, is achievable. It's about excelling in your craft while embracing other vital, enriching aspects of life. The interactions and personal relationships within my team and group created such meaningful connections on both personal and professional levels. I realized that so many partners were passionate about external commitments, such as serving on boards while also prioritizing family time and making sure that they were showing up for them, whether they had to take calls from the Little League field or whatever it was. I felt like Proskauer was a place where you can operate at the highest level, but that you did not have to sacrifice what's important to you. Mentorship also played a significant role, and Christine, I don't mean to get mushy, and I know I texted you this a couple weeks ago, but I would not be the lawyer I am today without you and everything that you taught me. It's not just the technical aspects of the law, but all the conversations and all the real moments in between.

Christine: That means so much to me. I'm often asked what my proudest professional achievement to date is and, particularly given all our high-profile work here, some are surprised by my response. Which is that I'm incredibly proud and thrilled to see so many of my mentees – like you – not only find their dream jobs within the industry but also find themselves equipped with all the necessary technical and mental tools to absolutely crush it at those jobs starting from day one. You are the epitome of that. You have achieved so much already, professionally and personally, and you're just getting started. Watch out, world!

Anyhow, you know I could chat with you forever, but I'm sure you have a full schedule for the day. Thank you for sharing your experiences and insights today – can't wait to catch up again soon!

Krista: I really appreciate it – thank you!

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- **Christine G. Lazatin**
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